AUGUST

20th

1923

25c

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

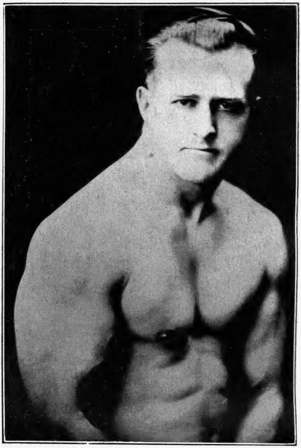
Adventure

Charles Hargens

T. S. Stribling
J. D. Newsom
Frank Robertson
Harold Lamb
H. S. Cooper
Arthur D. Howden Smith
Robert Russell Strang
Henry M. Haldeman
Thomas Topham

3 Complete Novelettes

Gee! But It's Great To Be Healthy!



Earle E. Liederman as he is to-day

Up in the morning brimming with pep. Eat like a kid and off for the day's work feeling like a race horse. You don't care how much work awaits you, for that's what you crave—hard work and plenty of it. And when the day is over, are you tired? I should say not. Those days are gone forever. That's the way a strong, healthy man acts. His broad chest breathes deep with oxygen purifying his blood so that his very body tingles with life. His brain is clear and his eyes sparkle. He has a spring to his step and a confidence to tackle anything at any time.

Pity the Weakling

Don't you feel sorry for those poor fellows dragging along through life with a neglected body? They are up and around a full half hour in the morning before they are half awake. They taste a bite of food and call it a breakfast. Shuffle off to work and drag through the day. It's no wonder so few of them ever succeed. Nobody wants a dead one hanging around. It's the live ones that count.

Strength Is Yours

Wake up fellows and look the facts in the face. It's up to you right now. What do you plan to be—a live one or a dead one? Health and strength are yours if you'll work for them, so why choose a life of suffering and failure?

Exercise will do it. By that I mean the right kind of exercise. Yes, your body needs it just as much as it does food. If you don't get it you soon develop into a flat-chested narrow-shouldered weakling with a brain that needs all kinds of stimulants and foolish treatments to make it act. I know what I am talking about. I haven't devoted all these years for nothing. Come to me and give me the facts and I'll transform that body of yours so you won't know it. I will broaden your shoulders, fill out your chest, and give you the arms and legs of a real man. Meanwhile, I work on the muscles in and around your vital organs, making your heart pump rich, pure blood and putting real pep in your old backbone. This is no idle talk. I don't promise these things—I guarantee them. If you doubt me, come on and make me prove it. That's what I like.

Send for My New 64-Page Book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send to-day—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5008, 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5008, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents for which you are to send me, without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." Please write or print plainly.

NAME ....

STREET ....

CITY .... STATE ....

Home-Study

Business Courses

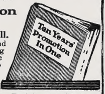
Do you want an important, high-salaried position? You can have one if you can do the work. LaSalle experts will show you how, guide you step by step to success and help solve your personal business problems. Our plan enables you to train during spare hours without interference with your present duties. Give us your name and address and mark with an "X" below the kind of position you want to fill. We will mail catalog and full particulars regarding our low cost monthly payment plan. Also our valuable book for ambitious men, "Ten Years' Promotion In One." Tear out, mark and mail the coupon today. No obligation to you. Let us prove to you how this step has helped thousands of ambitious men to real success.

— — — — *Coupon* — — — —

LaSalle Extension University

Dept. 8367-R Chicago, Ill.

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.


Ten Years' Promotion In One

- ☐ **Business Management:** Training for Official, Managerial, Sales, and Executive positions.
- ☐ **Modern Salesmanship:** Training for Sales and Advertising Executives, Solicitors, Sales Promotion Managers, Salesmen, Manufacturers' Agents, and all those engaged in retail, wholesale or specialty selling.
- ☐ **Higher Accountancy:** Training for positions as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.
- ☐ **Traffic Management—Foreign and Domestic:** Training for positions as Railroad and Industrial Traffic Manager, etc.
- ☐ **Railway Station Management:** Training for Railway Auditors, Comptrollers, Accountants, Clerks, Station Agents, Members of Railway and Public Utilities Commissions, etc.
- ☐ **Industrial Management Efficiency:** For Executives, Managers, Office and Shop Employes and those desiring practical training in industrial management principles and practice.
- ☐ **Modern Business Correspondence and Practice:** Training for Sales and Collection Correspondents; Sales Promotion Managers; Credit and Office Managers; Correspondence Supervisors, Secretaries, etc.
- ☐ **Banking and Finance:** Training for executive positions in Banks and Financial Institutions.
- ☐ **Modern Foremanship and Production Methods:** Training in the direction and handling of industrial forces — for Executives, Managers, Superintendents, Contractors, Foremen, Sub-foremen, etc.
- ☐ **Personnel and Employment Management:** Training for Employers, Employment Managers, Executives, Industrial Engineers.
- ☐ **Law: Training for Bar: LL. B. Degree.**
- ☐ **Expert Bookkeeping.**
- ☐ **Business English.**
- ☐ **Commercial Law.**
- ☐ **Effective Speaking.**
- ☐ **C. P. A. Coaching.**
- ☐ **Commercial Spanish**

Name..

Present Position ....

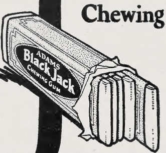
Address ....

"Wow!"

Good? You bet!
Juicy and mellow!
And mouth-watery!
Try that
"Good old licorice flavor!"

Black Jack

Chewing Gum



American
Chicle Co.

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879,

WHERE

the Summer's heat is exhausting try this:

Into a glass of cool water, stir a teaspoonful of Horsford's Acid Phosphate, and drink. Its "tart" delights the palate and quenches thirst, its PHOSPHATES, like those found in cereals, quiet the nerves and refresh the system.

HORSFORD'S ACID PHOSPHATE

feeds the body and tissues nourishment that is *essential to health,* in a form readily assimilable. At Druggists.

Write for SPECIAL BOOKLET telling how to make delicious fruit drinks, ices, etc., and giving important information about the nutritious PHOSPHATES. Sent free. Address

RUMFORD CHEMICAL WORKS
PROVIDENCE, R. I. M-49

OWN
this
GENUINE
Drop Forged
Steel
ASTRA Automatic

Buy direct from sole U. S. Importers and **Save ½**

Recognized by authorities as the **finest European Pistol.** The standard of the Spanish Army and after exhaustive tests was adopted by the French during the War. The equal of any similar American weapon which sells for **twice** the price.

You save Jobber, Wholesaler and Retailer profits by ordering direct from us at these special prices.

$8.95 25 CALIBER 7 Shot AUTOMATIC **$10.95** 32 CALIBER 10 SHOT AUTOMATIC Including Extra Magazine

WITH Triple Safety $9.25 Both Models Shoot Any Standard Ammunition

WARNING! Cast iron guns are very dangerous! We guarantee every **ASTRA** to be brand new and of **Drop Forged Steel Throughout!** Before buying any weapon, **INSIST** on this guarantee. We also absolutely **guarantee** the **ASTRA** against inferior workmanship! If you are not entirely satisfied, return within ten days and we will immediately refund your money.

SEND NO MONEY

—unless you wish. Just write your name and address clearly—state the model you wish. We will ship by return mail. You pay the postman (plus postage) when it arrives. Write for our new firearms catalog.

California Trading Company
Dept. 138 Terminal Bldg. Los Angeles, Cal.

Great Diamond Ring Bargain

Perfectly cut, genuine blue-white Diamond held aloft on six white gold prongs. Gentleman's 14K Green Gold, hand-carved mounting, trimmed with artistic scroll designs of White Gold.

$5.00 A Month

Buy Today 10 Months TO PAY

Send No Money—Ring sent FREE for your approval.
If entirely satisfied pay only **$10,** then $5 a month, for ten months until the total price of **$60** has been paid.

Free Gift Book shows thousands of other bargains in Diamonds, Watches and Jewelry.
Send for copy No. 303-N.

"THE HOUSE OF QUALITY"
CAPITAL $1,000,000.
L·W·SWEET INC.
1650-1660 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

$25 A DAY *Selling Shirts*

Large shirt manufacturer wants agents to sell complete line of shirts, pajamas, and night shirts direct to wearer. Advertised brand—exclusive patterns—easy to sell. No experience or capital required. Entirely new proposition.
Write for free samples.
Madison Shirt Co., 503 Broadway, N.Y.C.

LEARN **Electricity**

Great Shops of Coyne. Complete in 3½ months. $100,000 worth of electrical equipment.

Free Railroad Fare

Enter any time. Earn your way. Special limited offer. Drafting and Radio Free. *Send for Big Free Catalog.*
Coyne Electrical School—Dept. B-141
1300-1310 W. Harrison Streat, Chicago, Illinois

Earn Big Money Fast applying gold initials to autos. Every owner buys—$1.35 profit on $1.50 sale—particulars and samples free. Write quick.
LITHOGRAM CO., - Dept. 20 - East Orange, N. J.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG

We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 401-E Romax Bldg., New York

THE VALUE OF CHARCOAL

Few People Know How Useful it is in Preserving Health and Beauty

Nearly everybody knows that charcoal is the safest and most efficient disinfectant and purifier in nature, but few realize its value when properly prepared and taken into the human system for the same cleansing purpose.

Charcoal is a remedy that the more you take of it the better; it is not a drug at all, but simply absorbs the gases and impurities always present in the stomach and intestines and carries them out of the system.

Charcoal sweetens the breath after smoking, and after eating onions and other odorous vegetables.

Charcoal effectually clears and improves the complexion, it whitens the teeth and further acts as a natural and eminently safe cathartic.

It absorbs the injurious gases which collect in the stomach and bowels; it disinfects the mouth and throat from the poison of catarrh.

All druggists sell charcoal in one form or another, but probably the best charcoal and the most for the money is in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges; they are composed of the finest quality Willow charcoal powdered to extreme fineness, then compressed in tablet form or rather in the form of large, pleasant tasting lozenges, the charcoal being sweetened to be smooth and palatable.

The daily use of these lozenges will soon tell in a much improved condition of the general health, better complexion, sweeter breath and purer blood, and the beauty of it is that no possible harm can result from their continued use, but on the contrary, great benefit.

Many physicians advise Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges to patients suffering from gas in stomach and bowels, and to clear the complexion and purify the breath, mouth and throat. They are also believed to greatly benefit the liver. These lozenges cost but thirty cents a box at drug stores, and you get more and better charcoal in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges than in any of the ordinary charcoal tablets.

Stop Using a Truss

Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

Reduced
Fac-Simile

Grand Prix.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made **self-adhesive** purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached**—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered. **Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive.** Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We **prove** it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**

Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY**

PLAPAO CO. 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name ....

Address..

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao......................

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $60 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph system, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady work. Write for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE
204 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.

"I Knew You'd Make Good"

"I ALWAYS felt you had it in you to get ahead. But for a time I was afraid your natural ability would be wasted because you had never trained yourself to do any one thing well. Yes, I was afraid you would always be 'a jack of all trades and master of none.'

"But the minute you decided to study in your spare time I knew you'd make good. You seemed more ambitious—more cheerful—more confident of the future. And I knew that your employers couldn't help but notice the difference in your work.

"Think what this last promotion means! More money—more comforts—more of everything worth while. Tom, those hours you spent on that I. C. S. course were the best investment you ever made."

HOW about you? Are you always going to work for a small salary? Are you going to waste your natural ability all your life? Or are you going to get ahead in a big way? It all depends on what you do with your spare time.

Opportunity knocks—this time in the form of that familiar I. C. S. coupon. It may seem like a little thing, but it has been the means of bringing better jobs and bigger salaries to thousands of men.

Mark and mail it today and without obligation or a penny of cost, learn what the I. C. S. can do for you.

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2018-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Organization
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Banking and Banking Law
- ☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
- ☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Better Letters
- ☐ Foreign Trade
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Metallurgy ☐ Mining
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Radio ☐ Airplane Engines
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Blue Print Reading
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Plumbing and Heating
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Agriculture and Poultry
- ☐ Mathematics

Name..

Street 3-27-23
Address..

City.. State..................................

Occupation..

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Pyorrhea Strikes Four— Misses *Only One*

Nature warns with bleeding gums

Four persons out of every five past forty, and thousands younger, too, contract Pyorrhea.

So be on your guard, especially when the gums are tender and bleed easily.

Play safe. Brush your teeth with Forhan's For the Gums. If used consistently and used in time, it will prevent Pyorrhea or check its progress. Keeps the teeth white and clean, as well, and the gums firm and healthy. Pleasant to the taste. At all druggists, 35c and 60c in tubes.

Formula of
R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company
New York
Forhan's, Limited,
Montreal

Forhan's
TRADE MARK
FOR THE GUMS
BRUSH YOUR TEETH WITH IT
FORMULA OF
Specialist in DISEASES OF THE MOUTH
DENTAL

Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS
More than a tooth paste — it checks Pyorrhea

You, Too, Can Play the
HAWAIIAN GUITAR
Just as the Natives Do—

After Your FIRST LESSON You Will Play "ALOHA" We Guarantee That—

Our method is so simple, interesting and appealing that you begin in your first lesson to learn the famous Hawaiian Folk Song "ALOHA". Think how happy you will be when you surprise your friends by playing the fascinating Hawaiian Guitar *just as the natives do!*

Only Four Motions— and You Master Them Quickly!

In a few minutes you acquire the four motions necessary to play *any* piece—after that a short period of practice and you will have mastered this weirdly sweet music. Complete course of 52 lessons includes FREE beautiful Hawaiian Guitar, necessary picks, steel bar, etc. No extras.

No Previous Musical Knowledge Necessary

If you *never read a musical note in your life*—if you haven't even the slightest knowledge of music, we can quickly and positively teach you to play this wonderfully popular instrument. Don't be just a "listener" when you can *easily be the center of interest* among your friends.

Just Mail a Post Card for Details

of our remarkable FREE Hawaiian Guitar Offer—simply write: "I am interested"—*but do it today*

Address

First Hawaiian Conservatory of Music, Inc.
Desk 34, 233 B'dway
(Woolworth Bldg.)
New York City

Special arrangements for lessons if you have your own Hawaiian Guitar.

FREE A Beautiful Hawaiian Guitar

FRECKLES

Don't Hide Them With a Veil; Remove Them With Othine—Double Strength

This preparation for the treatment of freckles is usually so successful in removing freckles and giving a clear, beautiful complexion that it is sold under guarantee to refund the money if it fails.

Don't hide your freckles under a veil; get an ounce of Othine and remove them. Even the first few applications should show a wonderful improvement, some of the lighter freckles vanishing entirely.

Be sure to ask the druggist for the double strength Othine; it is this that is sold on the money-back guarantee.

BLUE WHITE Luxite DIAMOND
IF YOU CAN TELL IT FROM A DIAMOND SEND IT BACK!

GENTS' 1 CARAT RINGS $3.97
You'd gladly pay $150 for a genuine Diamond as **perfect** as this dazzling blue-white Luxite Diamond. Only expert can tell the difference. Full 1 Carat size, only $3.97 while this sale lasts; set in 14K GOLD S, guar., hand engraved, heavy tooth ring. **DON'T SEND A PENNY!** Simply send name, address and paper strip which fits end to end around finger. Deposit only $3.97 with postman when ring is delivered **we pay postage.** Money back if you're not delighted. If you send today we'll include **FREE** a pair of gold fin. engraved cuff-links, full size, high grade quality.

Garfield Importing Co., Dept. 131A, 3839 W. Roosevelt Rd., Chicago

FREE Automobile Mechanics, Owners, Garagemen, Repairmen, send for free copy America's popular motor magazine. Contains helpful, instructive information on repairing, overhauling, ignition, carburetors, batteries, etc. **Automobile Digest, 518 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati**

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every Owner Buys Gold Initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples.
AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 85, East Orange, N. J.

Adventure
Registered in U.S. Patent Office
August 20
1923
Vol XLII
No 2

Published Three Times a Month by The Ridgway Company

J. H. GANNON, President
C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in Advance
Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign Postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1923, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for August 20th, 1923, Issue

Swain's Stone *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . . Arthur D. Howden Smith 3
Orkney Islands—the beginning of a life-long feud.

M'Biam *Niger Superstition* . . . . Thomas Samson Miller 26

9 East *An Off-the-Trail Story** . . . . . . Robert Russell Strang 27
Coal mine—"whence came the face he drew?"

One Young, One Widow, One Old . . . . . . Thomas Topham 38
Alaska—Eskimos, rubber gum-drops and matrimony.

Slants on Life *Plum-Pudding and Friendship* . . Bill Adams 50

Fombombo *A Four-Part Story Part I* . . . . . . T. S. Stribling 51
South America—how a dictator runs things.

River Life *Chances for Sport* . . . . Raymond S. Spears 88

A Part of Every Man . . . . Henry M. Haldeman 89
Plains—the duel in the pass.

In the Rain *A Complete Novelette* . . . . J. D. Newsom 99
South Seas—a native who tried to be a king.

Letters from a Tramp—*At Sea* . . . . . . Frederick Campbell 115

The Three Palladins *Conclusion* . . . . Harold Lamb 116
Cathay—the judgment of Genghis Khan.

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

Medicine Arrow Maker *A Bit of Indian Life* . . . **Frank H. Huston** 142

Atmosphere . . . . **H. S. Cooper** 143
Southwest—a bad-man and a local-color hunter.

Not Three of a Kind ***A Complete Novelette*** . . . . **Frank Robertson** 154
West—brothers against the posse.

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 177

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 184

Ask Adventure 185

Radio 185

Mining and Prospecting 185

Tropical Forestry 185

Weapons, Past and Present 185

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing 185

Aviation 185

Lost Trails 185

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **Will Crawford**

Cover Design . . . . **Charles Hargens**

One Novel, Two Novelettes, Complete

STUDENT, gambler, man-about-town and aviator—*Robert Daly* hadn't found himself. Then came the orders from Washington—from *Graves*, the quiet, determined man who handled the secret affairs of the nation. Overnight *Daly*, along with *Tex MacDowell*, accepted a great undertaking—the breaking-up of the Dope Ring that stretched from Tennessee to Illinois. So began the blow that was struck from the sky. "THE MOMENT OF GREATNESS," a complete novel, by Thomson Burtis, in the next issue.

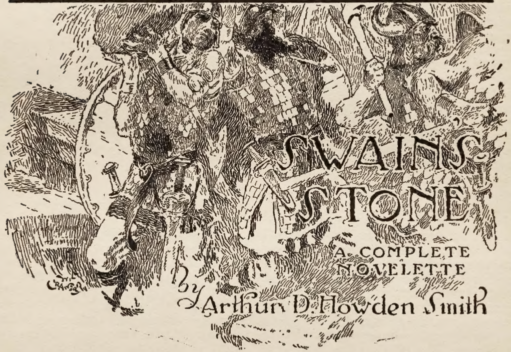
OUTLAWED for his part in a fight not of his making, *Swain* becomes a raider as desperate as any Norseman, and while his dragon ship harries the seas he plots vengeance. Fair promises made to the Bishop of the Orkneys, a secret pact with distant nobles, a sudden raid, and the plan is put into action. "SWAIN'S VENGEANCE," a complete novelette, by Arthur D. Howden Smith, in the next issue.

FASTIDIOUS *Joseph Barclay* accepted a post in China, smelled its odors and lost his thirst for romance; but he accepted a woman's dare and faced native hatred. "THE TRIAL OF A TIMID MAN," a complete novelette, by William Ashley Anderson, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure
Registered in U. S. Patent Office
August 20 1923
Vol. XLII No. 2



SWAIN'S STONE

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "A Son of Strife," "Beyond the Sunset," etc.

SWAIN pushed on through the low, dwarf trees of the wood, trees that had been battered and shoved and bent into caricatures of themselves by centuries of booming winds. He was sure, now, that he had missed the reindeer stag at the streamlet far back beyond the scaur of Nafar, but he heard in the distance the sounding roar of the surf and so he continued, hoping that he might be fortunate enough to encounter some belated fisherman who would save him the long tramp home to Dungalsbae along the rocky shore.

The sun was near to the ocean's western rim as he burst through the last copse and gained the verge of the broken cliffs, a ball of crimson, incandescently aflame, flooding the burnished surface of the water with a peculiarly hard, glittering light. There was an effect of stillness, which halted him in his tracks. The cliffs stood up to right and left as far as he could see, iron-bare, savage, menacing. Over the gravel beach at their foot waves rolled with a continuous, grinding beat. And far across the restless waters of Pentland Firth the opposite cliffs of Straumsey stood up like a great ship in the waste of waters.

His eyes swept the scene with instinctive pride. As a picture, of course, it meant nothing to him—except the thought that here his father ruled under the Two Jarls, aye, from the shores of the firth southward across the dales and hills of Caithness into the depths of Sudrland, where the dimly defined marches of Scotland began—the last outpost of the Norse power. But

Copyright, 1923, by The Ridgway Company, in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved.

the pride gave way to surprize, and then anger, as his gaze dropped to the rock-bound cove of Morkaorsbakki, almost a stone's throw beneath him.

A long dragonship was fending in betwixt the treacherous reefs, its crawling oars swift to respond to the steering sweeps astern, and behind it followed two ten-oared barges, all three craft crowded with people and heaped high with gear. Who came to these waters unannounced? Strangers, for certain. For Swain had left his father's stead at Dungalsbae that morning, and no word of visitors had been received up to that time.

Were they far rovers from the Norse viks, or Iceland outlaws or fierce freebooters from the Sudreyar? Whoever they were, they must answer to Olaf of Dungalsbae, and whichever of his sons came first upon them. Swain's action was as instinctive as his first feeling of pride in the vista of lands and waters he helped to rule. He strode down from the cliffs, without even staying to loosen his sword or draw an arrow from his quiver.

When he reached the pebbly beach the nose of the dragonship had taken ground and from her starboard gunwale a long plank had been outthrust to land. A group of men stood amongst the boulders about a woman, and servants were shifting bundles ashore. The newcomers saw Swain when he was still out of earshot, and they watched his approach with a curiosity savored with amusement. It was almost as if he were the trespasser, and not they, and he fumed with a young man's wrath, under the mockery of their eyes. He clinched his bowstave very tight; a frown wrinkled his forehead, and his lips under the down of his new beard met in a straight line.

"Who are you?" he called.

The group fell apart, leaving two who stood advanced, the woman and a youth of Swain's years, swart-skinned and black of hair where Swain was fair and ruddy. The woman was as tall as a man. Her hair was long and gray. But it was her face that caught Swain's attention, and held it. It was full and unlined, and her eyes were a bleak green. They made mock of him without changing their expression.

"And who are you?" she answered.

The youth at her side bellowed with laughter, and a chuckle came from the housecarles and servants at their back. The work of unloading the longship was abandoned that all might enjoy the baiting of Swain.

"I am Swain Olaf's son," replied Swain, battling with his temper. "None lands here without rendering account to my father, who governs this land for the Two Jarls."

A second laugh greeted this.

"What two Jarls?" demanded the dark young man.

"Jarl Paul and Jarl Harald," said Swain, puzzled. "It is plainly to be seen that you are not Orkney-born."

There was a third bellow of laughter, louder and more prolonged.

"We do not know the Two Jarls," returned the dark young man.

"Nay, there are no longer two jarls," added the gray-haired woman with the cold, green eyes.

"Now, do I know you are outlanders," insisted Swain, "and I warn you it is ill-doing, whether you come in dragonship or barge, to make merry with the Two Jarls, for their rule runs from Fridarey to the castles of the Scots."

"But we say to you, Swain Olaf's son, that there are no longer two jarls," said the gray woman.

"You say what you do not know," declared Swain, "and moreover, you come where you have no right to be. Shift your gear back aboard, and make sail for Dungalsbae. If you have any right in these lands my father will admit you."

"To my own lands?" mocked the woman. "These are not your lands."

"Nay, then, are they Olaf Gutorm's son's?"

"They——"

Swain cut himself short, overcome with doubt. His father's lands did not run so far west and north, of that he was sure.

"They are the jarls'," he replied in surly defiance.

"If they are the jarls', they are mine, also," she said placidly.

"We shall make trial of that," shouted Swain, drawing his sword.

The dark youth was not a moment slower in the same act, but the woman waved him back.

"Hold, Olvir," she commanded. "Do you not know me, Swain?"

He shook his head.

"I know only that you have no right here."

"Touching that we shall shortly make a test," she remarked. "Did you ever hear of Frakork Maddan's daughter?"

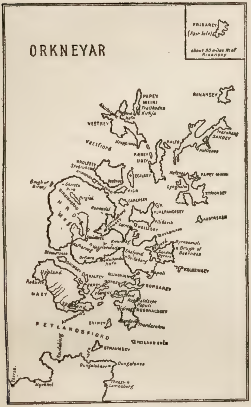
Swain made a gesture of disgust.

"That wizard!"

"I am she, and I will wither your arm, so that you can not draw a sword."

Swain's answer was to hack at her so swiftly that only the interposition of the dark youth's blade saved her head.

"Ha," grunted Swain, dancing to the attack, and slicing an arm off a housecarle who rashly sought to interfere; "if you are Frakork, old witch, this puppy should be Olvir Rosta, your grandson, who has his name from his love of strife. He shall have his belly full of me, Frakork, and you, too."


ORKNEYAR
FRIDAREY
(Fair Isle)
about 30 miles W. of Rinansey
RINANSEY
PAPEY MEIRI
Trollhadna Kirkja
Hofn
VESTREY
Vestfiord
Hreppisnes
RALFR
Ivarshaug
SANDEY
Hellisnes
PÆREY
EIDEY
HROLFSEY
Skebrohead
EGILSEY
Hofsnes
PAPEY MINNI
Brugh of Birsay
Christs Kirk
Vestnes
Lyngholm
VIGR
STRIONSEY
Birgisi
BIRGISHERAD
GARERSEY
Gja
HJALPANDISEY
AUSTRSKER
Renendal
Ellidavik
Carness
HELLISEY
Tanskarunes
Stainnes
Knarrstad
Dyrnesmuli
Brugh of Deerness
Skalpeid
Sandr
Dyrnes
Straumsnes
Orfiara
Hofn
GRIMSEY
Upland
KOLBEINSEY
Papuli
RALFEY
Rekavik
FAREY
BORGAREY
HAEY
Rognvaldsvoe
Papuli
ROGNVALDSEY
SVINEY
Thordarshru
PETLANDSFIORD
PETLAND SKER
STRAUMSEY
Raudabiorg
Dungalsbaer
Dungalsnes
Thorsa
Myrkhol
Thrasvik
Lambaborg

"Be quick in feeding him, then," she retorted grimly, as her retainers closed around. "You shall be raven's bait this hour hence. No, back, men, all! Let Olvir slay him, and if by chance he harms Olvir, you shall gut him on the beach."

This was the manner of the beginning of Swain's adventures, unpremeditated of himself. It was also the first coming into Caithness of Frakork Maddan's daughter and Olvir Rosta, and in afterdays, and for many years to come, their feud dripped a wide trail of blood all across the Orkneys and Scotland and into the Hjaltlands* and the Sudreyar† and south to Ulster and Dublin and Man. But of this all of those concerned recked little that afternoon on the beach of Morkaorsbakki. The housecarles and serving men made a wide ring, and Frakork stood inside it, her face as expressionless as ever, her green eyes blazing with the fire of the evil spirits that possessed her—or so all men said, and with reason. And Swain and Olvir Rosta leaped and struck and hewed at each other, with the keen zest of young men under spell of deadly hatred.

They were evenly matched. Swain was tall in his person, very shapely as men go, sinewy, lithe, sure on his feet as the reindeer of the upland dales. Olvir was somewhat shorter, with a broader spread of chest and shoulders, not so long a reach, perhaps, but a mighty striker of blows. In their tempers also they were alike, blazing swift to wrath, fearless of opposition, reckless of numbers, reckoning always to surprize an enemy off-guard, wholly self-confident.

Back and forth they stamped across the shingles, from the water's edge to the line of boulders that marked the limits of high tide, and the housecarles rattled swords on shields whenever Olvir landed a blow or compelled Swain to sidestep or spring in air to save himself; but when Swain struck to advantage there was a quiet so tense that you could feel it, and Frakork's green eyes smote at Swain's unprotected back as if she thought to smite him with physical strength.

There was no difference between them until Swain hewed with his blade at Olvir's head, and Olvir, aiming to avert the blow, guarded with his own blade. Sparks flew as the swords clashed, and Swain's edge slipped along Olvir's as far as the hilt, where it caught in the breaking-nick that was planned for just such an event. Snap! The high, clear song of shattered steel. Three-fourths of Swain's blade flared like a meteor in the sunset glow and rang upon the beach pebbles out of his reach. He stood defenseless, with only the hilt and a few inches of jagged blade left in his hand.

---

* Shetlands.

† Hebrides.

A roar went up from housecarles and servingmen. Frakork's expressionless face was blank as ever, but in the cold pools of her eyes an icy fire began to burn. Olvir shouted his triumph, and sprang forward, sword aloft to strike off Swain's head. But Swain was not there. Instead, he crouched, and leaped forward under the swing of the blow. His arms clasped Olvir's waist. He heaved his enemy high above his head, and poised him there, like a stone in the basket of a catapult on the walls of Mikligard.* An instant he held him, while not a breath was drawn. Then Olvir Rosta shot forward, like the stone from the catapult, and thudded two spears' lengths off upon the shingly beach.

A snarl of baffled rage from the housecarles, and the ring boiled in to tear Swain limb from limb. But again he was not there. The instant he had hurled Olvir Rosta from him, he spun on his heel and sprang at Frakork, confidently aloof inside the seaward face of the ring. His great arms clutched her; he pressed her tall body in front of him; the fragment of his sword was at her heart.

"There's not much to you, witch, for one so big," he growled. "Hold back your people now, or you shall try your sorcery on the ——."

The milling housecarles stood aghast at what they saw. Those in the rear pushed forward, but the front rank dug toes deep in the gravel and held back. Frakork was a hard mistress, true; but she paid well. Her followers never lacked for plunder. Also, they were in a bad plight, if anything happened to her, their leader, for reasons which have yet to appear. So they waited, swords quivering, eyes bemused.

"Will you die, Frakork?" demanded Swain impatiently.

"Some day, yes," she answered coolly.

"And now?"

"Now, I am thinking, youth. I have lived three of your lives. Death means little to me. Thinking means all."

"I am growing weary of holding this sword against you," snapped Swain. "And if you think to lead me to betray myself because you are a woman, remember that I know you also for a witch."

She twisted her head, so that she could plunge her green eyes daggerwise into his open blue ones. He shuddered, and involuntarily pressed the broken sword against her ribs. The blood stained her robe, but she made no outcry.

"Stand back, all my people," she bade them calmly. "Do some of you look to Olvir there. Let this young madman go free."

And when Swain started to carry her with him along the beach toward the path to the cliff-top, she exclaimed:

"I have said that you shall go free. Will you not set me down? I am an old woman, after all, young man, old enough to be your grandmother."

"You are a witch and a wizard, by what men say," he returned sourly. "I will let you down when I can trust to my own legs to carry me hence. And my father will have something to say of folk who come raiding his lands as you do."

"I have said they were not his lands," she answered.

"The Two Jarls', then," he panted, for the path had begun to climb.

All the housecarles and servingmen of the dragonship and the two barges were clustered, gape-mouthed, upon the shingle, watching as Swain backed away, Frakork's body interposed between himself and any venturesome spear-caster or archer.

"And I have said these lands are not those of the Two Jarls', either," she retorted. "There are no longer Two Jarls."

"Why?" he asked simply.

"Because, Swain, one of them is dead—and that has made a vast deal of trouble for me, who had planned otherwise, and is like to make more trouble for me, and in the long run, I think, also, for you."

"As how?" asked Swain, setting her down.

"Ah, that is for the future to show."

"But you are a wizard," objected Swain, "and so should know the future."

"I do not serve my enemies," she observed dryly. "May I return to my people?"

"Yes, and tell them to take you away. Go west of Raudabiorg, if you would keep from harm's way."

"You are young," she said, after a moment. "Ask your father where Maddan Moddad's son's lands began hereabouts. Ask, also, who inherited them."

"Rather, I'll ask the priest for a charm against your spells," snapped Swain.

---

*Constantinople.

She gave him a queer look.

"I am no forelooker," she said slowly, "but I feel I shall hear more of you, Swain Olaf's son. And it would have been better for you, if you had driven what was left of your sword into the heart of Olvir Rosta when you held him in your arms. He is a bad enemy, is Olvir. You shall yet hear from him—and from me."

"Why should I fear an old woman and a boy I have beaten, unarmed?" sneered Swain.

Her green eyes searched his face, feature by feature. Of a sudden her countenance, so fresh, so unlined, for all the pile of years her unbent shoulders bore, became convulsed with a passion so demoniac that Swain started back with arm raised to protect himself—from what he did not know.

"Because there is no weapon like hatred," she shrilled. "Boy, I have been the death of one mightier than you shall ever be. Many a strong man has died when I overlooked him. Beware lest I overlook you."

Swain's common sense came to his rescue.

"You have tried to already, and failed," he declared.

"How do you know?" she asked, as the unholy fires died in her eyes.

"If you might have done so, you would have done it by now," he argued.

She gave him a shrewd glance.

"I can see that you have more wit than many might suppose," she commented. "However, Swain, if I can not reach you, I can reach those you love and who are near to you. You have insulted me, Frakork Maddan's daughter, who have the blood of jarls in me, and you have cruelly beaten my grandson. You shall pay for it, Swain Olaf's son. You shall pay to the last drop of blood, and the last sob of grief, and the last throb of anguish. I swear it! I swear it, by the old gods our people have cast off since Olaf Tryggvi's son preached the White Christ—and I swear it by the Christian Devil! I swear it by all the evil there ever was or ever will be!"

There was something fiendishly unearthly about her spare figure outlined against the cliff-edge, with the background of flaming sunset and tossing waters, metallic in the level glare. Her arms tossed aloft in a final gesture of denunciation, and Swain turned from her and ran.

IT WAS dark when Swain trotted past the outbuildings of his father's stead, but the open doorway of the skalli cast a beam of yellow light from the hearthfire into the shadows. On the doorstep sat his brothers, Valthiof and Gunni, cleaning fish.

"You found no reindeer, Swain?" greeted Valthiof, the oldest of the three.

"I found a stag, and lost him," answered Swain. "But I found that, too, which was greater sport."

"What?" asked Gunni, the youngest.

"A man-fight and a witch."

Valthiof and Gunni dropped their gutting-knives and rose, excited, to their feet.

"What talk is this, brother?" demanded Valthiof. "Do you jest?"

Swain pushed past them, and called his answer over his shoulder:

"I must have speech with our father. Follow, and you shall hear all."

But in the ale-room he encountered his mother, Asleif, who was superintending the maids as they drew off a cask. She was as tall as Frakork the witch, and her golden braids were as heavy and unbleached as a girl's. Her face was the face of a mother of warriors, lofty, yet gentle.

"Walk softly, my son," she said. "Your father has had sad news this night."

"I know," answered Swain. "And I have sadder for him."

There was a pine-torch in an iron holder, and by its glare she saw a spatter of Frakork's blood on his jerkin.

"You have killed a man!" she exclaimed.

"Better if I had!" he returned bitterly, remembering the witch's jeers. "Come with me, mother, and you shall hear all."

From the ale-room they passed into the hall, a long room, with a peaked roof and a fire blazing on a stone hearth in the center, its smoke eddying amongst the rafters. Along the walls hung skins of wild beasts, and arms and armor. Benches lined the sides, and against the south wall was built the high seat of Olaf. Beside him, as Swain entered with his mother and brothers, sat a huge barrel of a man with a narrow, cruel face and a great forked beard that was black as the smut on the wainscoating.

"So you are home at last, Swain," said his father in a tone of displeasure. "It is not fitting that you should wander in at any hour when we have a guest who is a famous man."

Swain bowed respectfully.

"I am content that you shall judge me when you have heard my tale," he replied.

"Fair-spoken," exclaimed the black-bearded guest in a voice like a thunder-peal. "You bear a great name, youth. Look well to it!"

And he laughed as if he had said something funny—and Valthiof and Gunni laughed with him. But there was a little line between Asleif's brows, and Olaf frowned.

"Our guest bears the same name that you do," explained Olaf to his son. "He is Swain Briostreip (Breaststrap), Jarl Paul's forecastle man."

"Yes, Swain Olaf's son, look well to your name," repeated Swain Briostreip, draining an immense horn of ale. "It is a responsibility. I can see that you are large for your years, but you must never let a man confuse us in some niddering deed."

"My son is a brave youth and as little likely to cause shame as another," interrupted Olaf impatiently.

"No doubt, no doubt," assented Swain Briostreip. "Is he a good drinker? Come, young Swain, let us see the measure of your belly. Here is this horn I have quaffed at a draft. Let us see if you can empty it in two."

But Swain shook his head.

"I am no ale-drinker," he said.

"What do you drink?" laughed Swain Briostreip. "Water?"

"Enough, enough," interposed Olaf a second time, seeing the flush that mantled his son's face. "The boy is no weakling, Swain, and that should satisfy you. He can follow the reindeer stag for a day and a night without tiring."

"Aye," replied Swain Briostreip, "but can he follow a man?"

"I can fight with a man," snapped young Swain.

"Ha, ha, ha," roared Swain Briostreip. "Innocence has barked an answer. Well, young Swain, next time the Jarl sends me roving you shall come with me, and we'll make trial with you against the English, who are strong men of their hands."

"I shall go on my own roving cruises," retorted Swain Olaf's son.

"You are disrepectful in your speech," reproved his father. "Also, boastful. And this is a time for sober thoughts. Our guest comes from Jarl Paul with word that his brother, Jarl Harald, is dead."

"Then she said truth!" exclaimed Swain in bewilderment.

"Who said truth?" demanded Swain Briostreip.

And Asleif stepped nearer to her son, as he replied, reciting in as few words as possible his adventure of the afternoon. His father and his namesake heard him to the end without interruption.

"You did well, Swain," said Olaf, then.

"Aye, but he might have done better," added Swain Briostreip. "Why did you not slay Frakork when you had her in your power? She will be the death of many more for that, even as she told you."

"No son of mine slays women, unless he must," spoke up Asleif.

Swain Briostreip raised his bristling black eyebrows.

"They call you a wise woman, Asleif," he answered. "Yet your words are foolish."

"What must be, must be," she said. "And a brave man is not a woman-killer in this land."

"But there is some question as to whether a witch is in truth also a woman," Olaf reminded her.

Swain Briostreip laughed again, so that the smoke bellied up into the open space under the roof's peak.

"Men call me an outsitter* and a sorcerer—yet am I nonetheless a man!" he cried.

There was no answer, and all in the hall eyed him askance, for he had an evil reputation for his dealings in the black magic of the old Norse gods, and Bishop Williams, at Egilsey, had threatened him with excommunication—from which, indeed, he had been saved only by Jarl Paul's influence.

"Is there such a thing as magic?" asked Asleif doubtingly.

"And you are called a wise woman!" scoffed Swain Briostreip.

"That is she!" retorted Olaf. "None wiser."

"I might tell you tales that would——"

Swain Briostreip broke off abruptly, and gloomed at the rafters.

"But Jarl Harald's death is proof for you," he continued presently.

"Aye, you have yet to tell us how it came about," pressed Olaf.

"It was the work of Frakork, past doubt," said Swain Briostreip. "She did not boast amiss to my young namesake here. As you all know, she has always favored Jarl Harald, who indulged her wickedness, and hated Jarl Paul, who is holy enough—" this with something of a sneer—"for the shaven-heads of Egilsey. So, when the Two Jarls held feast at Orphir a few days since, she prepared a shirt for Jarl Paul, which was so woven with a powerful spell that the touch of its cloth meant death to whoever wore it. But as it chanced, while she was finishing it, Jarl Harald, himself, entered the stofa, and perceiving it lying upon a bench, made shift to try it on. Nor would he stop when Frakort entered, and seeing him with it drawn over his head, cried out that he should put it off. The next day he sickened, and the day after he died. And the bruit of what had happened getting about, Jarl Paul banished Frakork and her kindred from the isles, knowing well that if she remained about his person she would compass his death in some other way."

---

*Sitting out at night to secure from the spirits of the dead foreknowledge of the future.

"Why did he not slay her outright?" asked Olaf.

"Nay, she denied the shirt had wrought Jarl Harald's death, and said the truth—that she would have been the last to cause his death. And she has so many friends amongst the disaffected Jarl Paul was loath to cause more trouble—if only because his cousin, Rognvald Kolson, has become a favorite of King Harald in Norway, and presses for a share in the islands. So the end was that he banished Frakork to the lands she had of her father in Caithness, admonishing her that she should cause no more trouble; and it was to acquaint you with this, and Jarl Paul's wish that you should leave her at peace, so long as she keeps peace, that I was sent hither."

"Where do Maddan Moddad's son's lands begin?" asked young Swain from the skalli floor.

"Why, this side of Morkaorsbakki, as I remember," replied Olaf.

"Then she had the right of me in that," said Swain, "for she bade me ask you where they began and who inherited them."

"She has the right of it," Olaf admitted, "and see to it, Swain, that you keep away from her stead. If Jarl Paul has let her go in peace, it is not for us to make more trouble."

"Aye, if you seek trouble, young water-drinker, come with me next time I fare over Rann's bath," invited Swain Briostreip, emptying his ale-horn. "You shall have trouble—and perhaps a broken head."

Young Swain glowered at him.

"I do not fear you," he muttered.

Swain Briostreip's face became a threatening mask.

"Beware lest I overlook you," he grated in a rumbling whisper. "Do you know, boy, that I outsit with the spirits of the dead, that I can bide by the houghs of your father's father and all his people, aye, and their enemies, and stir them to haunt you? Do you know that I can put a curse——"

Young Swain laughed his derision.

"Nay, Swain Briostreip, I do not think you are as powerful a sorcerer as Frakork, and she put a spell upon me to wither my arm, but no harm came to me. I do not fear you."

Swain Briostreip half-rose from his seat. There was a filmy cloud over his eyes.

"Swain shall be the bane of Swain," he muttered as if to himself.

Olaf caught him by the shoulder, and dragged him back into his seat.

"The boy is my son," said Olaf sternly. "He is forward, which is not surprizing at his age and after he has just won his first fight, but that is no reason for a man of your name——"

"It is the name will do it," interrupted Swain Briostreip.

"Why, that is to be seen," rejoined Olaf. "Fill up your horn. Asleif, send a maid for more ale, and do you, boys, go about your business. This is men's talk here."

Swain Briostreip sank moodily on the bench.

"Aye, it is to be seen," he agreed. "Be careful, young water-drinker. For your father's sake, I have not overlooked you. But be careful. And keep your name from mine."

This was the beginning of the quarrel between Swain and Swain Briostreip, which was the cause of Swain's later adventurings.

III

DURING the months that followed Swain and his brothers often sailed past Morkaorsbakki in their fishing-boat, and marked the skalli and outbuildings which Frakork's people had raised and the long shed over the dragonship on the beach; but there was no intercourse between the steads at Dungelsbae and Morkaorsbakki, and when Olaf's people hunted inland they gave the witch-woman's lands a wide berth.

At Yule Olaf's family sailed to Orphir to celebrate the feast with Jarl Paul and his chief odalmen and boendr, and they were present when ambassadors from Rognvald Kol's son presented their lord's demand, approved by King Harald of Norway, that Jarl Paul should yield up to Rognvald one-half of his lands, being the share which Jarl Harald, Paul's brother, formerly had held.

"And why should I do this?" Jarl Paul asked mildly of the messengers.

He was, above all things, a man noted for the easiness of his disposition, generous with his retainers and chiefs, averse to warfare and leaning upon such others as Swain Briostreip when he must resort to violence.

"Mark you," he went on, "King Harald is my lord, and I so own him, yet I see not why he should undertake to disperse my lands, without consulting me. If Rognvald was my brother or my son or my nephew, it might be different; but he is, in fact, my cousin, twice removed."

Swain Briostreip swaggered to the front of the skalli, which was crowded with Jarl Paul's people.

"Yes," he shouted, "why should our good Jarl give to his second cousin what he owes to his own family? Go back to your master, and tell him that the men of Orkney will teach him better manners if he has the courage to put his claim to the chance of battle."

"That will we," returned the chief of the ambassadors, unabashed. "And our lord says by us further that if Jarl Paul's answer is unfavorable he will spare no expense and no amount of blood-letting to drive him from his lands. Coming in peace, he will take only the half. Coming in war, he will take all."

"Brave words!" answered Swain Briostreip. "But words do not win battles or carry dragonships."

"That is to be seen," replied the ambassadors.

"Yes," agreed Jarl Paul, still without heat, "and do you go back to your master, and bid him for me learn modesty and justice."

The odalmen and boendr in the hall loudly applauded this speech, for at that time Jarl Paul was popular, both because of his mild manners and because he had not taken the opportunity of his brother's death to deal harshly with any of those who had been of Jarl Harald's train, saving only Frakork and her following, for whom no man had a good word to speak. And the ambassadors went down to the shore and boarded the longship which had carried them from Norway, and the younger men who had been present in the skalli accompanied them out of curiosity to see them depart upon so unusual a venture as a voyage to Norway at Yuletide.

Swain Olaf's son, with his brothers Valthiof and Gunni, was of these young men, and it was he who exclaimed when the longship turned west past Grimsey and Straumsness, instead of sailing southeast, through Medallands Hofn and between the mainland and Glumshorn, into the eastern sea.

"That is a strange way for Norway," he said.

"You have made the voyage so often," mocked Valthiof, with a brother's scorn.

"But see, brother, that way they dare the full force of the Western Ocean, and the other——"

"They are men old in seafaring," rebuked Gunni. "You will be trying to instruct Jarl Paul next—just because you have been in a fight and a witch tried to spell you!"

But Swain persisted in returning to the skalli and seeking speech with his father at Jarl Paul's high table. Olaf heard him out indulgently, as did the Jarl and several other chiefs who were within earshot; but Swain Briostreip could not forego the chance of belittling him.

"By Thor and Odin!" swore the sorcerer, knowing that thereby he shocked all true Christians. "It is my namesake, the water-drinker. And now he has discovered a plot against our good Jarl. You grow rapidly in fame, Swain Olaf's son. Our lord must call upon you for counsel with the oldest and wisest, I see."

Swain flushed and his hand went to his sword, but he answered the taunt steadily.

"Nay, I am not of those who swig ale the while enemies plot against the Jarl," he said.

There was a laugh at this, for Swain Briostreip was the greatest hornman of the Orkneys. Men came from the Sudreyar and as far as Iceland to match drinks with him.

"If you can not drink, perhaps you can pluck a horn from the air," snarled Swain Briostreip, and without more warning, he hurled the vessel in his hand at young Swain's face.

Swain's hand shot out from his shoulder; there was a smack as his palm met the rounded surface; and the next instant he had tossed the horn back upon the table in front of the black-bearded giant.

"I can do all things that an ale-drinker can do," he said.

This time again the laugh was with him, and Jarl Paul, himself, took up the conversation.

"I can see you are a youth of promise, Swain Olaf's son," he remarked kindly. "But as your lord, I would advise you to practise with your weapons before you make an enemy of as famous a man as Swain Briostreip."

"Practise or not, it is all the same thing," rasped Swain Briostreip. "He bears my name, and there shall be trouble from that some day. I have said it. Swain shall be the bane of Swain."

"No, no," insisted the Jarl. "He is a brave youth, and to be encouraged. I take it kindly that he came to acquaint us with his suspicions of Rognvald's men; but his father will be the first to tell him that it matters little which way they went home, so long as they went and tell faithfully how our Orkneymen resented their message."

There was much cheering at this, and clashing of swords and ale-horns on the tables, and under cover of it, Swain withdrew, fuming inwardly at the reception he had had, and vastly displeased, notwithstanding the Jarl's courtesy. Nor was he less disgruntled later when he sought again to interest his father in the route the longship had followed, and Olaf rebuked him sternly for youthful folly and immodesty in daring to thrust his advice, uninvited, upon grown warriors and chiefs.

AFTER the Yule feast the gathering broke up, and Olaf and his family sailed home across the Pentland Firth, scudding desperately before the harsh wind that blew from the northwest; and all the time Swain was wondering in his mind how the messengers of Rognvald could have driven their longship against such mighty blasts with no lee to protect them. But he said no more about it, having had his lesson, and he spent the balance of the Winter with his brothers, hunting and fishing and managing the affairs of the stead under his father's instructions.

It was late Spring before Swain had occasion to sail westward through the firth, and being alone at the time, he steered close enough in shore to examine the appearance of Frakork's stead at Morkaorsbakki. Great was his surprize to see dragonship and barges gone, and the skalli boarded up. From a single out-house a plume of smoke rose, and a few women and old men worked in the planted fields. Swain came to a decision with his usual impetuosity. He ran back until a tongue of land hid his movements from the steading, then put in to shore and drove his keel up on a stretch of the shingly beach. From here it was a half-hour's walk to Frakork's fields, and he made no difficulty of bespeaking one of the servants.

The old man trembled under Swain's interrogation, but held to the assertion that he knew nothing of his mistress's plans. She and Olvir Rosta, with all the able-bodied men, had sailed west for the Sudreyar as soon as the Winter winds had lost their most dangerous violence. What they were planning to do he did not know, go a-viking, most likely. Olvir Rosta, young as he was, had successfully conducted a raiding cruise the Summer before. And Swain's gorge rose at the thought that this youth, no older than himself, whom he had bested, unarmed, was two cruises ahead of him already. He relinquished a temptation to put a torch to the skalli, and returned to his boat, in no mood for fishing.

To add to his discomforture, his father heard his news with scant interest.

"Frakork keeps a full company of house-carles," Olaf said. "She must feed them and pay them, and such lands as she has left will not do that. It is natural for her to send Olvir on viking cruise. They are burning in the Sudreyar or Ireland—it is nothing to us, so long as they keep the peace in Caithness."

Twice again in the next month Swain visited Morkaorsbakki, but without securing more information; and Summer was at hand when a Danish merchant put in to Dungalsbae and reported having sighted Frakork's dragonship in Scotland's Firth. Another month passed, and then one day a barge dashed up to the beach in a shower of foam, the oarsmen pulling as if their lives depended upon it. One of Jarl Paul's housecarles sat in the bow, and he leaped to shore without waiting to help in beaching the craft.

"A summons from the Jarl!" he shouted to Olaf and his sons. "Shove out your longship and muster your men. Rognvald is in the Hjaltlands and Frakork and Olvir Rosta are leading a fleet from the Sudreyar to join him. The Jarl's men gather at Westness in Hrolfsey."

With that he was off again, and Olaf's people set about the task of hauling out the dragon, which lay in its shed on Dungelabae shore. The sails were taken down from the rafters in the women's bower, where they had been kept dry and warm, and the oars and sweeps and the mast and gear were routed from beneath the skalli's benches. Weapons and armor were stripped from the walls and loaded in the decked after-cabin, and Asleif and her maids packed the forecastle space with food and ale and water. The older men who were no longer fit for cruises went over the seams to make sure there were no leaks, and stowed a sufficiency of stones under the midships planking, partly for ballast and partly for use as missiles in close fighting.

Then there was a final mustering of tenants, servants and housecarles, and eighty of the strongest were told off for crew. It was still early in the afternoon when all was ready, and Olaf and his sons gathered in front of the skalli to say good-by.

"I have bidden old Gorm Fostrison take charge here for you, wife," said Olaf, "seeing that it is not fitting when the Jarl is in great need of our aid, that one of our sons should remain at home."

"That is as it should be, husband," replied Asleif. "Our sons, now that they are grown men, can not be behind their father."

And she kissed each of them calmly and without tears, but if there was any difference in her farewells she lingered longest over Swain. As has been said, she was known for a wise woman, and some claimed that she had the gift of fore-looking; but be that as it might, it is certain she had the feeling that Swain was destined for great things.

Swain had thoughts of his own. The dragon had been floated, and his father was preparing to go aboard over the landing-plank, when he made a suggestion, which men afterward said did much to alter the course of events.

"See you, father," he said. "There are two ways for Frakork's fleet to come up from the Sudreyar."

"Undoubtedly," returned Olaf.

"If they come by the west of Hrossey and through Efjusund the Jarl's people will sight them," continued Swain.

"Any fool would know that," rejoined his father. "Get to your point, boy."

"My point is this: If they come by Pentland Firth and then up the east coast of Rognvaldsey, how is our lord to know of their coming? He may be surprized."

"That is well-thought," agreed Olaf. "What is your plan?"

"That you leave me behind you in my red fishing-boat, which can outsail any longship in these parts, and I will keep a watch off Rognvaldsey, and if I see Frakork approaching I will sail on before them and carry word to you at Westness."

Olaf clapped him on the shoulder.

"You have used your wits, Swain. You shall do so. And Jarl Paul shall know of your forethought."

So when the longship stood out past Pentland Sker, the red fishing-boat lurked behind, running close-hauled under the lee of Rognvaldsey, the first of the larger island masses of the Orkneys, which lies to the south and east of Hrossey, called by the islanders the Mainland, because it is the largest.

Swain watched the dragonship gradually dwindle in the distance like a red-and-green insect crawling on its sixty oars across the quiet Summer sea. To the south he could see the smoke rising from Dungelsbae steadroofs and inland from scattered farms. A fisher's cottage showed on tiny isle Sker. The coast of Rognvaldsey at his back was dotted with steads and cots, mainly deserted in fear of a descent from Frakork's people or some wide-roving longship of Rognvald's fleet. And the waters of the Firth stretched absolutely empty, almost at rest for once, disturbed by no more than a slow, easy lift and swing, except where treacherous currents ripped and swirled in the center of the channel.

Nothing happened before darkness shut down, and Swain knew that no fleet would attempt that passage at night, so he beached his craft in a cove on Rognvaldsey and slept until the eastern sky began to whiten with the first hint of day. With that he munched such food as he had in his waist-pouch and put out into the Firth. He was scarce a quarter way to Sker when low in the west he sighted a clump of masts and hulls stealing quietly toward him.

He counted them as well as he could, half-disposed to wonder if they could really be his quarry. Now that his fears had been justified he was inclined to question his own eyes. But no twelve vessels sailing in close company in those waters were bound upon a peaceful errand. A fleet meant war or piracy; and in the circumstances they could be no other than Frakork's contingent bound north to meet Rognvald's longships from Norway—and Swain experienced a sensation of misgiving at the idea of two such strong forces combined against Jarl Paul.

There was one thing for him to do—outsail the enemy with word of their approach. He ran up his sail, squared off before the steady southwest breeze, and the red fishing-boat slipped through the water at a pace that soon dropped the clump of masts below the shadowy horizon's rim.

Rognvaldsey was no more than a gray cloud astern of him as the sun came fairly out. He left Borgarey on his left and ran through the gut between Kolbeinsey and its attendant rocks and Deerness, bore up to the north again and ran into the heart of the islands, past the Muli of Deerness. It was early morning when he sighted Jarl Paul's fleet, five dragonships, fully manned, off Westness, and his heart sank anew at the odds against them. But he rallied his courage as he remembered that most of the dozen masts he had sighted had been too low to rise over war-dragons. A part, the greater part, of Frakork's fleet were open barges, and could never meet a longship in open fighting. At any rate, there were no more than two courses—to fight or to flee. And he knew the Orkneymen too well to believe that they would yield before the heaviest odds when flight meant exile. So he hauled taut his sheet, and wove in and out of the rocks to the side of the *Seascraper*, Jarl Paul's dragon, lying at the outer end of the line of ships.

IV

JARL PAUL and his chiefs stood on the quarter-deck of the *Sea-scraper*, arguing the plan of battle, and Swain marveled at the various views expressed. To him there was but one course to pursue.

"It is all very well what the water-drinker says," bawled Swain Briostreip; "but we have yet to reckon with Rognvald, and the last news we had was that he had put into Alasund in the Hjaltlands with six dragonships. Suppose we go against Frakork and Olvir, and Rognvald comes upon us from the rear? My counsel is that we steer for Alasund and account first for Rognvald. It may be we can pick up another dragon or two on the way."

"Not so," objected a second man, Sigurd of Westness, who was very rich and chary of his future. "My counsel is that we await them all here, for if they best us at sea, nevertheless we can then take to the land, which we know well, and they will be hard put to it to——"

"The land!" sneered Swain Briostreip. "You mean *your* land. Westness means nothing to the rest of us."

And so they disputed back and forth, Olaf alone arguing openly for meeting Frakork's fleet. Jarl Paul stood in the midst of them in his silvered coat of mail, with his sword at his side and his raven shield on his arm, and pulled his mustaches and wrinkled his brows, inclining now this way and now that. For he was a man who believed in justice and was fond of decisions that inspired no resentment, and therefore he dreaded to do aught which would create dissension in his following.

Swain, still standing by the helmsman's bench on the quarter-deck, listened to all this talking with steadily growing impatience, and at last he could support it no longer. Availing himself of a temporary lull in the debate, he thrust himself forward and called out to the puzzled Jarl—

"Do you see the sun, my lord?"

Jarl Paul followed his pointing finger toward the sky.

"Yes, Swain; but what has that——"

"The day shortens apace," rejoined Swain. "You have talked close to an hour already, and Frakok's people are so much nearer to you, and Rognvald's likewise, if they have started. I am a youth, with no right to be here, but I say it is foolish for tried warriors to waste time in this fashion. This is more like the women's stofa in my father's skalli than the quarter-deck of a dragonship. Make an end of talking, and do something."

All in the group stared at him with a surprize which on several faces rapidly became resentment or anger. Never before had a youth whose beard was scarce grown so harangued his betters.

"What manner of cub is this?" demanded Sigurd.

"Is it so you train your sons, Olaf?" asked Thorkel Flettir.

But Swain Briostreip roared the loudest of all, so loud that the crews of the other longships came to the shield-walls on their starboard sides and stared in amazement, wondering what was happening aboard the *Seascraper*.

"Who are you, water-drinker, to speak as an equal to your father's friends? For this I will whip you the length of the gangway. Too long you have been allowed to nourish your insolence."

Olaf knew not what to say. He believed Swain had spoken justly, and at the same time his feelings were outraged by his lack of respect.

"The boy means well, Lord Jarl," he stammered.

"He means insolence," shouted Swain Briostreip. "Ho, in the waist there! Fetch me a rope's-end, well-knotted."

But Jarl Paul stopped him.

"No fighting, my friends," he commanded, stepping to young Swain's side. "We shall need our swords for our enemies, and our ropes'-ends for captives. Also, I think there is much in what Swain Olaf's son has said. He is a forward youth, yet a wily. If I mistake not, it was he who drew our attention last Yule feast to the fact that Rognvald's messengers sailed west from Orphir, instead of east."

"It was I, Lord Jarl," answered Swain sturdily; "and it would have been better for you if you had heeded me at that time, and sent after them, for it is certain that they fared toward Caithness and arranged this hell-brewing of today with Frakork and Olvir."

"Hold your tongue, boy," his father ordered unhappily. "Men have lost their's for less than you have said."

Jarl Paul dropped his hand on Swain's shoulder.

"No, I take it in good part," he answered. "The youth means well, and if he lives he will be a great warrior. He has given wise counsel, and I shall accept it; and as a sign of my approval I shall retain him at my side in the fighting, for I know one as quick-witted as he will be equally ready with his hands."

There was grumbling over this, but Jarl Paul was firm in his decisions, once he had been driven to reach them, and there were certain men, Sigurd of Westness, for one, who were not sorry to see a slight put upon Swain Briostreip.

The outsitter made no secret of his feelings as the chiefs dispersed to their ships.

"It is sufficiently humiliating to bear the name of an unwhipped puppy," he snarled, "but how much worse it is to fare battleward with him on the same deck. We shall have to detail our stanchest shield-men to protect him, and if Frakork's men come aboard he is more likely to injure his friends with his sword than do harm to our enemies."

Young Swain held his peace, partly because at that moment Jarl Paul held his arm.

"It is a well-manned ship which carries two such fire-eaters, an old one and a young one," the Jarl said with a smile. "With Swain on the forecastle and Swain on the quarter-deck we shall sweep all before us."

"From the mast to the dragon, yes," grunted Swain Briostreip.

"It will be you who give ground first, Swain Ale-drinker," flashed young Swain.

A laugh broke from all the chiefs.

"Words are words," hinted Swain Briostreip darkley. "And I say, Swain will be the bane of Swain."

"Peace, peace," called Jarl Paul. "Get to your station. Put the oarsmen in the benches and make ready the sail. We have far to go before nightfall."

THE ships moved speedily, and they were off Tankerness when the masthead men sighted twelve sails rounding the point of Muli. Jarl Paul frowned at the spectacle.

"They are twice our number in men," he muttered. "I reckon naught of the extra ships, except that it will enable them to come on us from all sides."

"But how if we bound our ships together, Lord Jarl?" Swain suggested eagerly. "Two and two, with your dragon alone between both pairs?"

Jarl Paul stroked his beard, considering.

"That is a wise thought, young Swain," he said finally. "But if you permit me to save argument this time, I shall use it as coming from my own mind."

And he had the sail lowered, until the

following ships came up, when the orders were shouted from deck to deck and cables made fast, prow and stern, so that, as Swain had advised, the five dragons lay in three tiers, two in the first, the Jarl's alone in the second, and two more astern of the *Seascraper*. The oars were drawn in, helms were donned and weapons laid out, and they awaited the enemy's coming, nor did they wait long.

At the first sight of Jarl Paul's raven sails, the twelve invaders increased their speed, and Swain, on the *Seascraper's* quarter-deck, could see the spray spurting from the oar-blades and swashing back from the shapely prows as they drew nearer. Their decks were jammed with men, squat, hairy fellows from the Sudreyar; lean Irishmen; immense, red-haired Scots. A distant shouting grew louder and louder, and with a faint, sighing *hiss-tsst* the first arrow quivered into the *Seascraper's* side.

"Hither, shield-men!" ordered Jarl Paul. "Give the helmsmen cover. No, not you, young Swain. I want you at my side."

So the two fleets came together, men shouting, oars rattling, shields and armor clanking as the missiles drove home. Frakork's vessels split into two divisions and came up on each flank of Jarl Paul's line. Only one of them was sufficiently large by itself to lie against any of Jarl Paul's dragons, and that was Frakork's own longship. The others were smaller longships or else open barges, holding thirty men apiece. These flung themselves indiscriminately against the joined dragons. But Frakork held off until she made sure which was Jarl Paul's.

Then the hostile dragon turned in, and Swain for the first time identified the witch-woman's tall figure on the quarter-deck, dressed in mail coat and with shield on arm and spear in hand. On the forecastle stood a squat, dark-browed figure, which he knew must be Olvir Rosta, and he caught up a spear from the deck and hurled it with all his might at Olvir's breast. But at that moment the stem of Frakork's ship rammed the *Seascraper's* side forward of the mast, and he was pitched from his feet and overthrown with the Jarl and all who had not caught hold of the bulwarks. When he stood up, Olvir and a swarm of housecarles had boarded the *Seascraper*, and Swain Briostreip, descending from the forecastle, was battling madly to hold the waist in front of the mast, while the archers of Frakork's quarter-deck drove their shafts into the huddled ranks.

"This is a bad business," said Jarl Paul, surveying the shambles on his own deck. "What was that?" as a long object whistled past his shoulder.

"It was Frakork's spear, Lord Jarl," answered Swain, pointing to the writhing body of one of the helmsmen, pierced through shield and mail.

Jarl Paul made to cast his own spear back at the impassive figure whose rich robes flowed beneath the covering harness, but he held his hand.

"No, I can not assail a woman," he said. "Our Lord was born of a woman."

"But not that woman," objected Swain practically.

Jarl Paul smiled.

"True, Swain, and yet it seems to me your father told me that once you might have killed her, but did not."

"I shall know better next time," returned Swain, and cast another spear at her.

But she interposed her shield and it glanced off into the ranks of her archers.

"The spear is not made that can kill me, Swain Olaf's son," she called shrilly across the narrow space that separated them. "I shall not die by steel. Ho, archers, shoot me those two, Jarl Paul in the silver mail and the youth at his side."

The arrow-flight battered their shields and rang on helms and mail, and Jarl Paul grimaced at the bite of a shaft that found a shoulder-joint.

"Hitherto, you have given counsel, Swain," he said. "But now, if you will listen to me, we shall abandon this place, where we are of no use, save to attract the enemy's archers and the guile of that witch, and drop into the waist. Unless I greatly err, your namesake is hard-pushed."

"Even as I said he would be," boasted Swain.

"All the more reason, then, for you to save him," replied the Jarl.

He lifted his voice in a shout that quelled the fighting amidships.

"Olvir Rosta, stand forth!"

Olvir lowered a bloody sword, and turned his eyes toward the quarter-deck.

"Who calls?" he demanded.

"Your lord and Jarl."

And with this, Jarl Paul threw the spear he had withheld when he faced Frakork.

It drove like a beam of light lengthwise of the crowded gangway, over the heads of friends and foes, and Olvir lifted his hacked shield to catch it.

"You must throw harder than that, Jarl Paul," he answered, plucking it from the tough linden-wood, and he flung it back so fast that no man saw it, and Swain marveled how the Jarl was able to raise his shield in time. The point tore through the emblazoned raven and clanged upon the Jarl's breast with such force that he fell to the deck, and all men held their breath, thinking that he was dead. But in the next moment, Jarl Paul had scrambled to his feet again, and he leaped from the quarter-deck to the waist and ran forward, shouting:

"To me, Jarl's men! To me! Paul goes forward!"

Swain followed him, struggling first to force a passage between their own men, but soon breast to breast with Olvir's housecarles, brawney, war-hardened fellows, who feared nothing afloat. They were pushing steadily aft, herding the *Seascraper's* men before their shield-wall, and Swain was boxed in with the herd, until a swirl in the fighting carried him amongst the rear benches next to Swain Briostreip.

"Ho, water-drinker," barked the outsitter, "how is it you have not broken Olvir's shield-wall?"

"I have waited to see you fling him back from the forcastle," replied Swain.

"He never set foot on the forecastle," foamed Swain Briostreip, which was true, for the enemy had boarded farther aft.

Jarl Paul disengaged himself from the wavering line across the *Seascraper's* waist, and hurled himself upon the two Swains.

"All is lost if we do not fight Olvir off," he cried. "Come! We must try one more charge."

Young Swain slipped in a puddle of blood as he made to accompany the Jarl, and barked his knee upon a jagged stone which stuck up from the ballast under the deck-planks.

"Here is the way to fight Olvir off," he shouted, heaving the stone above his shoulder, and he tossed it over the heads of their men into the opposing ranks.

It cracked the helmet of one of Olvir's housecarles and crushed the head beneath. There was a gap in that menacing shield-wall, and the Jarl's men stormed into it, their courage revived.

Swain Briostreip was down on his knees, tugging at a second stone, as young Swain stooped for a third.

"This is for Olvir, himself," roared Swain Briostreip, poising his missile to take aim.

Swain Olaf's son staggered up beside the sorcerer, his eyes seeking Olvir's swart face in the shield-wall.

"I'll hit him first!" he challenged, as he identified Frakork's grandson at the far edge of the opposing line, balanced on the larboard gunwale.

The two stones whistled through the air side by side, but midway of their arc they struck each other, and one shot downward to smash the arm of a luckless housecarle. The other struck Olvir Rosta a glancing blow on the shoulder, and he went spinning overside.

A shout of dismay rose from his followers. A yell of satisfaction came from the Jarl's men, and they surged forward with a rush that drove their enemies before them. Swain Olaf's son, racing to the gunwale to seek trace of Olvir, had a brief glimpse of a pair of unarmored men roping an inert figure in the water, and then he was caught in the whirlpool that swept the last of Olvir's people back to Frakork's dragon. Several of the *Seascraper's* crew started to climb after the fugitives, but Swain Briostreip pulled them back.

"Stay aboard, Jarl's men!" he bellowed. "They are cutting the grappling-ropes—and we have not enough strength to carry their deck without aid. Wait for our friends, and we'll give chase."

From Farkork, herself, came an answering call, thin and penetrating:

"Out oars, all! Never heed those fools, if they board. We'll take care of them. Back water! Back, all oars! Pull, larboard oars! Back, starboard! Steady, away! Pull, starboard—pull, all!"

Young Swain, hanging to the rigging, saw the long dragonship crawl around on its tail, as it were, and make off, its oars dipping wearily and with effort, its waist strewn with dead and wounded men. His eyes were fastened upon two figures on the quarter-deck—Frakork, tall and stately in her armor, undaunted in the face of defeat, and Olvir Rosta, struggling to his feet beside her, arguing with fierce gestures against flight.

"The witch is the wiser of the two," sneered Swain Briosteip in his ear. "Well, water-drinker, that was a good plan of yours, to use the ballast-stones. But not many could have hit their mark at the first throw, as I did."

"As you did?" repeated young Swain.

"Who else? And but for your stone's striking mine in mid-flight I should have hit Olvir fair in the chest and he would have been dead by now."

Swain swallowed hard.

"It was my stone struck him," he gasped.

Swain Briostreip chuckled.

"The boy's head is turned," he appealed to Jarl Paul, who was close by. "He thinks he did all."

"He did much," returned the Jarl pleasantly.

"But he says it was his stone that hit Olvir!" exclaimed young Swain.

"Very likely," said Jarl Paul soothingly. "He is an old warrior, Swain Olaf's son. But no man on my ship fought better than you, as I will tell all men."

"Nevertheless," persisted Swain stubbornly, "it was my stone struck Olvir, and but for the ale-drinker's hitting it in air, it would——"

"Ha, ha, just what I said," laughed Swain Briostreip. "What a boastful youth!"

"But I——"

"But you!" mocked the outsitter. And with sudden wrath: "Have a care! You tempt me too far, young Swain. From your father's son I have accepted much, but there is a point past which none ventures. No man alive can rob me of my deeds. A cut throat lies that way!"

Swain Olaf's son's sword was out, but Jarl Paul came between them.

"Here are two men will be the death of me, their lord," he protested, half-laughing. "Peace, both of you! At the least, it was Swain's stone struck Olvir down. No man can deny that."

There was a laugh from the housecarles and servants of the Jarl around them, for the wit of the contention pleased all.

"Yes, yes, Swain did it," men called out all over the deck. "It was Swain's stone, whatever be said."

"Aye, and not Swain Briostreip's," growled young Swain.

"I said Swain's," repeated the Jarl. "Put up your sword, young Swain. See, the enemy are fleeing right and left. Your father and Eyvind Melbrigdi's son have cleared five of them. We must give chase."

And this was the way of the battle which some men called "The Hunting of Frakork," but others named "Swain's Stone." No two men agreed upon who flung the stone, but all said Swain did it. And like the stone thrown in the pool, which sends ripples farther than the eye can follow, this stone, which could not be traced to the hand that flung it, impelled happenings which ran on and on over the years, until it would be difficult to say where they stopped—if they have ever stopped.

V

JARL PAUL'S five dragonships followed the remnants of Frakork's fleet along the east coast of Hrossey and Rognvaldsey into the Pentland Firth, but when the enemy turned their prows toward the Sudreyar the pursuers abandoned the chase and steered back to Tankerness. In the night two more longships came to them, together with many additional troops, so that it was possible for the Jarl to man the five small longships taken from Frakork, and in the morning he found himself at the head of a fleet of twelve ships, big and little. All men were agreed now that the one thing to do was to fall upon Rognvald at once before he had word of Frakork's defeat, and they sailed north for the Hjaltlands, regulating their course so that they should reach Alasund about dusk.

At Alasund everything fell out as had been planned. Rognvald and most of his men were ashore, and Jarl Paul's fleet easily possessed themselves of his six dragons after slaying the ship-tenders, all except one who swam to the beach and carried tidings of the disaster to his master. That night the Orkneymen slept on their rowing-benches, and in the morning Rognvald came to the shore with his troops, and shouted a challenge to Jarl Paul to land and fight out their quarrel, shield-wall to shield-wall, so that it should be finally settled.

Olaf and several other chiefs were for accepting this challenge, but in the end the Jarl decided against it for reasons which satisfied all his supporters. He pointed out that they had succeeded sufficiently in crippling Rognvald's ability to come against them by taking his dragons. Also, Rognvald still had upwards of five hundred warriors, who were schooled men-at-arms, professional vikings, while the Orkney levies were mostly composed of farmers and servants. And besides this, the Hjaltlanders were his friends and would muster sufficient support for him to overcome the superiority of the Orkneymen.

"It is probable that we should win," concluded the Jarl, "but we should lose many of our own people, and I see no reason for ruling the death of hundreds of my friends merely to secure the death of Rognvald. Moreover, he is the close friend of King Harald, and the king would never forgive me if I caused his death."

The upshot of it was that Jarl Paul sailed away to Orphir with the captured dragons, and Rognvald was left to accept the hospitality of the Hjaltlanders, until sufficient merchantships were secured to carry his expedition home to Norway. Although he was a stout warrior and afterwards gained a great reputation, it was many years before he lived down the humiliation of the defeat Jarl Paul had put upon him.

Jarl Paul was much pleased with the victory he had won, and he held a sumptuous feast at Orphir for all his friends and vassels. He was careful at this feast to single out both Swain Briostreip and Swain Olaf's son for equal honors, calling again and again upon the scalds to recite the story of their deeds, and the matter of Swain's Stone became a common jest of the countryside, so that if men disputed over who had done or said anything people laughed and said—

"It is another Swain's Stone."

He also made presents to those who had helped him, bestowing a farm upon Swain Briostreip and Frakork's lands and the isle of Gairsey upon Olaf of Dungelsbae. To Swain Olaf's son he gave the dragonship of Rognvald, *Deathbringer*, a splendid craft of thirty oars a side, with a red sail and upper works, saying—

"You have yet to go upon your first viking cruise, young Swain, but when you do I think the youths of the islands will flock to you, and it is my desire that you shall be prepared to win the success you deserve."

Swain thanked him, and with the help of his brothers and their people shifted the dragon to his father's new estate at Gairsey, where they hauled it ashore under a proper shed and made it safe for the Winter. All men approved the favor the Jarl showed him, except Swain Briostreip, who declared openly that it was a shame a boastful cub should be permitted to assume the place of a chief when he had never yet been on viking cruise or justified himself without older men's aid. But Olaf and the Jarl saw to it that the two Swains were kept apart, and no harm resulted at that time from their feud.

Of Frakork word came that she had established herself upon an estate in Sundrland under the protection of the Scots, and an Iceland rover brought news in the Autumn on his way to the north that Olvir Rosta had been plowing a path of blood and fire through the south of Ireland, taking vengeance where he could for the defeat he had suffered at Jarl Paul's hands.

"But he tells all men," added the rover, "that the one he holds chiefly to blame for what has happened to him is Swain Olaf's son, and he promises that the day will come when he will exact payment tenfold for Swain's Stone."

Swain Olaf's son was standing near in Jarl Paul's skalli, and he laughed.

"It is easily to be seen who Olvir thinks cast the stone," he observed.

"No, there are two named Swain," replied the Jarl. "How could Olvir be sure?"

"And one Swain is a famous man and the other is a niddering," said Swain Briostreip.

"Peace, peace," adjured the Jarl wearily.

But people took even more account of Swain Olaf's son after that, and Swain Briostreip sat out all the long Autumn nights men said, seeking a spell to put upon his namesake. So the days passed to another Yule.

VI

AS USUAL, Jarl Paul invited Olaf Gutorm's son and his family to the Yule feast at Orphir that year; but Olaf replied that he had so much work to do on account of his acquisition of Frakork's land at Morkaorsbakki that he must bide at home in Dungelsbae, and he was at pains to muster all his family and relations for the feast, seeing that it signalized a year of great prosperity. Swain and Valthiof and Gunni, with the young men of the tenants and the housecarles, were busy hunting and fishing a month in advance that there might be a sufficiency of food for all the guests.

Three days before Yule Asleif decided that she would pay a brief visit to her sister, who dwelt at Lambaborg, a short distance south of Dungelsbae on the coast of Caithness toward the beginning of the Breida Firth; and Gunni elected to accompany her. Also, there was a cry this day from the kitchen-maids that the fish was all salted, and Olaf bade Swain, after carrying his mother and Gunni to Lambabiorg, to put out to sea and try for a full catch that there might be fresh fish for the guests who would commence arriving the next day.

"Stay out until you have covered the thwarts," he said, "if you are absent until Yule Eve."

There was no thought in the minds of any of them that danger was near, and indeed, as the luck fell it would have helped in no wise had Swain and Gunni and the few men with them remained at home. Rather, it was fortunate that by accident some of Olaf's family escaped the doom Frakork had plotted for all.

For what happened was this: Olaf and Valthiof had made their rounds of the stead the night before Yule Eve, seeing that the barns were fastened and the cattle shut in their pens, and sat at meat in the skalli, laughing at the troubles Swain must be having at sea, when there came of a sudden a wild howling and yelling from the stead-yard, and old Gorm Fostrison burst into the hall.

"Olvir's men are all about us!" he cried. "They have fired the stables and the ricks."

Olaf and Valthiof snatched up their swords and shields and ran to the entrance of the skalli, with a handful of servingmen at their backs, for most of their housecarles had been dispersed amongst the houses of the tenant farmers. There were not, altogether, more than six or eight men in the skalli at the time.

From the doorway they could see clearly by the towering flames of the burning ricks and outbuildings the scurrying figures of Olvir Rosta's men forming a ring around the skalli.

"This is a bad business," said Olaf.

"Let us run out and see if we can cut through them," suggested Valthiof.

"No, that way lies death. Let us, first, see if we can arrive at a composition with them."

And Olaf raised his voice and called for Olvir.

"Who is that?" answered Olvir, standing forward in the tightening ring about the skalli.

He wore a horned helm, after the fashion of the old viking people, and the fires made his sword shine red as if with blood as he held it naked in his hand.

"It is I, Olaf Gutorm's son. Why do you come here, burning and slaying, Olvir?"

"For vengeance. Who has taken my family's lands and aided to drive me from my own country?"

"You rebelled against the Jarl. I did no more than keep my faith with him."

"Words, all words," snarled Olvir. "I played a hand and lost. Now, I play a hand and win—and so that I may win, you must lose."

"I will pay you composition for your lands," offered Olaf. "I owe you no blood-money."

"You owe me for a stone that made me a laughing-stock amongst men," rejoined Olvir savagely. "And the payment for that stone shall be in blood."

"Put it to the trial of combat, then. We will come out and fight you."

"No, it will do you no good to come out, Olaf. We shall drive you back, and burn you in your own skalli."

He turned and signaled behind him.

"Bring up those torches, you men, and set the roof alight."

The words had not left his lips when the torches began to curve through the air and clatter on the sloping roof and eaves. It had been a dry Winter, and a smell of burning wood was wafted through the rafters. Olaf shook his head sadly.

"This is the end, Valthiof," he said. "Yet I will try once more."

And again he hailed Olvir Rosta, while the flames licked upward from the roof.

"Will you let some of us fight our way out, if we can?"

Olvir hesitated, and a tall, robed figure stole to his side from the shadows that dodged and shifted over the steading as the flames leaped and twisted.

"I will let Swain come out for that purpose," he answered.

"Swain is not here," replied Olaf. "He is where he will be safe to plot his own vengeance for this night's work."

"Then none may come out, except to be maimed and cast back."

"But there are women."

Again the robed figure glided into the light and inclined its head toward Olvir's ear.

"We will allow all the women to pass through us, safe and unharmed, saving only Asleif," he said then. "Of your family not one shall escape us, Olaf. If we do not slay Swain this time, yet his end is certain, for we will be his enemies to the day of his death."

"Swain can look to himself," returned Olaf grimly. "And it is bad for your plans, Olvir, that Asleif and Gunni, too, are safe. You will not make a clean sweep tonight. But I have one more request to make of you before we try steel and fire."

"What is that?" asked Olvir, and he signaled his men in closer, fearing a strategem to put him off his guard.

"I have here Gorm Fostrison. He is an old man. His father was my father's foster-brother. I would have you let him go free. He is not in this quarrel by any tie of blood."

Olvir Rosta made instant acceptance of this.

"He shall go free," he promised. "I admit it the more gladly because I am anxious to save a voice to tell your family how I have humbled them."

Gorm was very loath to go. He had taken a sword from the wall and was resolved to die by his master's side; but Olaf presented the case to him in a few words.

"I must have one to carry sure word of this to Swain," he said. "Also, I would have Asleif know how Valthiof and I died. I can not trust this to the maids."

"Very well," agreed Gorm, his face all working with grief. "It is the sorriest night of my life, but Swain shall be told, if they, indeed, let me live. Almost I hope they will betray their promise. What shall I say to Swain, master?"

"Tell him that Frakork's hand directed this work, and that my last word is to carry to her the doom she wrought for me."

"That is a message easy to remember, master. And what shall I say to Asleif?"

Olaf glanced back into the skalli. The heat of the burning roof was already perceptible, and the flames were spreading over the side walls. Bits of burning wood commenced to fall upon the beaten floor. The smoke was almost strangling, but through it, by the glare of the torches that stood in iron holders fixed to the roof pillars, he could see the door of the stofa at the far end. Beyond lay the bower in which he and Asleif had lived for twenty-odd years. He sighed.

"Tell her— No, tell her that my thought of her can not be compassed in words, Gorm. Bid her for me steel Swain and Gunni to stop not for blood-money or toil or danger or the passage of years, until Frakork and Olvir are dead. That is all."

Valthiof in the mean time had been mustering the sniveling maids from the kitchen and ale-room, and they were ready at the door. Olaf called again to Olvir, who stood a spear-cast distant.

"Gorm brings out the maids."

Olvir merely nodded his head, but the tall, robed figure appeared from the enshrouding shadows, and as the little file of women stumbled, weeping, across the steading, it went up to them and drew back the hood of each and stared into the lined face of Gorm.

"She is no fool, that witch," commented Olaf. "Many a man has been smuggled in woman's gear from a burning skalli. Well, Valthiof, how shall we make an end—in here where our foes can not exult over our sufferings. Or in the open?"

Valthiof was a simple youth, big as Swain in girth and stature, but without his quickness of wit. Withal, he was held honest and steadfast.

"It is my desire to take some of them with us, father," he said. "But I will be governed by you."

"That is an honorable wish," approved Olaf.

He turned to the five or six of the serving-men and housecarles who remained with them.

"I know that you are all brave men," he said, "and not afraid to die with your master, but if there is one of you who thinks he might prevail upon Frakork and Rosta to let him go safe, I shall not blame him."

They shuffled their feet uncertainly, and then one, the oldest, answered:

"No, master, none of us would seek safety, if we might have it. We have plowed and reaped, sailed and fought, with you, and your fate shall be our fate, even as your enemies are our enemies."

The others rattled their swords on the shield-faces, and a bright light—brighter than the glare of the flames that were blazing all around them—shone in Olaf's face.

"A man has not lived in vain who can

count upon such followers to die with him," he cried. "Come! Let us slay and be slain!"

There was a great shout from Olvir's housecarles as the little band plunged into view from the burning house. So high roared the flames now that every tuft of grass and boulder in the steading stood out clear and distinct, and the cleverness of Frakork was revealed by the trick she had held in reserve for this moment. For she had six archers with her under a low wall, and these men loosed arrows into the group as soon as they appeared, killing several of the unarmored servingmen and wounding another. By the time Olaf and Valthiof came to blows with Olvir's swordsmen their strength was cut in half.

To Gorm and the group of maids, who stood under guard behind Frakork, the fight seemed to last interminably, but actually it was over in the time required for Olvir's shield-ring to close around Olaf's people. Two men Olaf slew, and a third died from the loss of an arm that Valthiof hewed off. Then they were overborne by dint of numbers, crushed between grinding shields, hacked and hamstrung—and their twitching bodies cast back into the raging furnace of the skalli.

The flames bellied in mad delight as the bodies were hurled through the doorway, and the green eyes of Frakork glowed with infernal joy. Gorm Fostrison shuddered and the maids hid their faces when the witch woman turned to them.

"This is the fate of those who joined in the 'Hunting of Frakork'!" she said. "Tell Swain Olaf's son that I go now to brew death for him, but I think it will be a long time coming. He is to be the death of many before his own end finds him."

Gorm Fostrison was a brave man, for all his age and his spindling figure.

"Where shall I tell Olaf to seek you, lady?" he asked.

The witch woman studied him impassively.

"Where he can not follow," she answered.

VII

SWAIN drove ashore before an easterly half-gale at dusk of Yule Eve, his boat brimming with haddock and plaice. His mother and Gunni met him on the beach, and he heard their tale in silence. When they had finished and Gorm Fostrison had added such details as he asked for, Swain walked to the ashes of the skalli and stared moodily at the gray waste which had been his home and was his father's tomb. Night had shut down, and the Winter stars sparkled frostily overhead.

"If I sought to satisfy myself, I should gather such men as we could reach, take ship with them and sail west until I found Olvir and his witch grandmother," he said.

"That is the best plan, anyway," urged Gunni impetuously. "And I will go with you."

But Asleif answered—

"It is best that you should try to determine what your father would have desired, Swain."

"That was my thought," he replied. "And he would have wished me to do two things—acquaint Jarl Paul with this insult to him, as well as to us, and make you safe."

"My safety means nothing to me," she returned. "My heart is under those ashes."

"Nevertheless, it means much to us," he said. "Moreover, it is to be remembered that Gunni is over-young to go on viking cruises."

"If you are old enough, I am old enough," declared his brother.

"No, you have yet to gain some of your strength. And also, our mother must be protected and helped, and our lands guarded. If one of us goes to sea, the other must stay by her, and since I am the oldest I say that I shall go and you shall stay."

Gunni grumbled sorely at this, but Asleif quieted him with a mournful gesture.

"How shall I be safe?" she asked Swain.

"At Gairsey, on our new lands, mother. It is plain that here you can not bide, without a roof to cover you or food to eat; and here, too, you would be exposed to a second raid from Frakork. Gunni shall take you to Gairsey, with Gorm to aid you in establishing yourself. I go now to Jarl Paul."

They started that night in two boats. The larger party sailed all the way to Gairsey by sea, but Swain crossed the Firth to Swefney, secured there a pilot for the inner waters, and kept on to Knarstane. From there he traveled overland to Orphir after a day's rest. He came into the Jarl's skalli just before evensong of Yule, and the feasting was halted the while he told his tale.

Of those present, at the high table and

along the common men's benches, all exclaimed with sorrow, Jarl Paul most of all; but Swain Briostreip, who sat in his accustomed place at the Jarl's right hand, was silent. They were drinking mead in cups, and Jarl Paul made his cup-boy fill a cup for Swain Olaf's son, and because it was cold and he had traveled far, Swain accepted the drink, although, as has been shown, he was known from boyhood for his distaste for strong drink. Swain Briostreip extended his cup to be refilled at the same time, and he sneered when the cup-boy poured his namesake's only half-full at a sign from Swain Olaf's son.

"Bah, water-drinker!" he said. "You are a sluggard at your drink—and a sluggard at drinking must be a sluggard at fighting."

He tossed off his cup at a draft, winking his eye at the rest as Swain Olaf's son downed a half-cup with difficulty.

"It is for others to say if I have been backward in fighting," rejoined young Swain.

"You have not been in a hurry to avenge your father's death," declared Swain Briostreip. "Some men would have burned oarholes before this in so good a cause."

"That is an unfair charge," interjected Jarl Paul before Swain Olaf's son could express resentment. "Every one of us knows that young Swain is as hardy a man of his hands as old Swain."

There was a mutter of approval which ran around the four walls of the skalli. If men feared Swain Briostreip for his bullying ways and his dabbling in black magic, they liked young Swain for his splendid figure, his forwardness in counsel, his energy in battle, and his native kindness for all who were friendly with him.

"It shall not be long before I launch a dragon to search for Olvir and Frakork, if my master the Jarl gives me permission," said young Swain now. "I came here to tell him that he had been defied, in order that he might take such measures as he deemed necessary for upholding his own name."

Men wondered at these words, for they were plainly meant to draw from Jarl Paul an offer to join in the search for Olvir; but this was farthest from Jarl Paul's thoughts. He was noted far and wide for his dislike of viking cruises and his unwillingness to fight, unless it was in defense of his own lands and rights. But he spoke young Swain courteously, as was also his wont.

"I see no reason for our entrusting a venture to these stormy Winter seas, Swain Olaf's son," he answered. "Your intention does you credit, and it is certain that sooner or later you should undertake to punish Frakork and Olvir; but there is time enough for that in the future, if they are not slain first by others for their countless misdeeds."

Swain thought a moment.

"Is it your meaning, Lord Jarl, that I should not launch my long-ship at once?" he asked.

"Yes, Swain, for you may depend upon it that Frakork and Olvir have bedded their ship for the Winter and retired into the hills of Sudrland, leaving watchmen to apprise them of the coming of any enemies. If you went against them now you would have your effort for your reward, much bloodshed, little accomplished—at most, the empty satisfaction of burning a deserted steading."

This was wise counsel, as was generally agreed, and Swain bent his head in acquiescence.

"I am a young man, Lord Jarl," he said. "I have much to learn. What you say is just, and I shall abide by it, hoping that when the time comes you speak of you will aid me in my task."

"I shall always be glad to aid you, both for yourself and for the memory of your father," the Jarl replied graciously. "And now, in token of my favor, I invite you to sit here at my left, and join the feasting with us. Olaf Gutorm's son was a famous man, and it will not irk his spirit to see his son given the place he used to hold."

Swain Briostreip rose from his seat on the Jarl's other side as young Swain climbed to the dais.

"The young rooster flies to the rafters," he growled. "Well, if the smoke blinds his eyes and he tumbles into the cooking-pot, whose fault will it have been?"

This caused a chuckle from the company, and Swain Olaf's son flushed.

"Were you speaking of me?" he asked.

"Why should I speak of you?" countered Swain Briostreip.

"Because you seem to have me on your mind," returned young Swain, regaining his placidity. "And I am not honored by it."

Now the chuckle went against Swain

Briostreip, and a rumble came from deep down in his huge chest.

"That which shall be seen, shall be seen. But Swain shall be the bane of Swain!"

People thought little of his words because he had been drinking much, and the mead was heady; but when he descended from the dais Jarl Paul called after him:

"Why are you leaving us, Swain? Where do you go?"

He turned his head and leveled across his shoulder at young Swain a glance so instinct with evil that all who marked it shuddered and crossed themselves—especially after his answer.

"I am going into the night—to think."

"He means that he will sit out again with the dead spirits," men whispered one to the other, at the high table as well as on the common benches.

Jarl Paul frowned disapprovingly.

"He is a strange man, Swain Briostreip," he said. "Bishop William at Egilsey will not have him in the church, claiming he is in league with the devil, but after all and whoever he leagues with under the earth or over the earth, for me he has been stalwart on land and sea."

The feast continued, and there was much discussion of the year's events and the fighting and Frakork's and Olvir's raid upon Dungelsbae, and in the midst of it Jarl Paul turned to Swain Olaf's son and said:

"Swain, you are a youth I would always have at my back. I have it in mind to be a stout friend to you. Will you do me a favor?"

"Gladly, if I can, Lord Jarl," replied Swain. "What is it?"

"Do not take notice of Swain Briostreip when he seeks to insult you. I would not have you two fight for all the gear within these walls."

"But how if I can not escape it?" asked Swain.

"I have told you my wish," said the Jarl coldly.

"I will do what I may, Lord Jarl," responded Swain. "But there are limits to what a man can promise."

"It will be to your advantage if you oblige me," declared the Jarl; "and to your disadvantage if you do not."

Swain thought deeply over this, and he decided that he had best remove himself from the feast, if the Jarl intended to hold him responsible for anything which befell betwixt him and his namesake. So he made to rise from the table, but Jarl Paul plucked him by the sleeve and restrained him, saying that they did not intend to bed that night. Indeed, it was midnight when Swain Briostreip lurched in through the skalli door again and resought his place on the farther side of the Jarl's chair.

By this time the mead was all gone, and the company were drinking ale in horns, each man using a horn to suit his taste. Swain Olaf's son, out of courtesy to the Jarl, who liked his guests to have a good time, was drinking very moderately from a small cow's horn, which, as a matter of fact, one of the cup-boys had fetched from the women's stofa. Swain Briostreip marked this at once, and he reached beneath the table and dragged up his own ceremonial horn, which he employed in his drinking competitions, an enormous receptacle as long as a man's arm.

Jarl Paul, observing that Swain Briostreip's gaze was fixed upon young Swain, leaned over to the black-bearded sorcerer and whispered in his ear.

"Yes, yes, Lord Jarl," rumbled Swain. "None could feel gentler than I tonight. Is not this the feast good Christians celebrate with humility?"

And he laughed a great, thunderous, bull laugh that drew all eyes toward them. Abruptly he bent forward in front of the Jarl and offered his horn to young Swain.

"Here, boy," he said. "I will exchange horns with you, as our Lord Jarl bids me remember that we are to keep the peace with each other."

Swain was bewildered for a moment, uncertain how to act. Then he saw that the cup-boy, in bringing him the smaller horn at the Jarl's suggestion, had left before him the larger horn which he had rejected, one almost as big as Swain Briostreip's. He picked this up and extended it.

"I am glad to accommodate you," he answered.

The Jarl laughed, despite himself, and Swain Briostreip, snatching the larger horn from his namesake's hand, flung it on the floor-rushes.

"You could not empty even that, water-drinker," he fumed. "No, I meant that woman's toy you hold in your other hand."

"Oh, this one?" said Swain Olaf's son, lifting the little horn to the level of his eyes.

"I am sorry, Swain, that I am still using it; but if you would like one similar I make no doubt the Jarl will find it for you."

Men laughed lustily at the idea of Swain Briostreip drinking from a woman's horn, and under cover of the mirth and Jarl Paul's attempts to distract the sorcerer's attention, young Swain slipped from the high table and gained the porch of the skalli, glad to fill his lungs with the cold, clean night air, after the drunken boisterousness and riot of the hall. He did not feel like sleeping, and as the bell was ringing for midnight mass in the Jarl's church opposite, he decided it would be a pious deed to seize the opportunity to say a few prayers for his father's soul.

WHEN he came from the church the night was bright with the distant glare of the northern lights, prancing in crazy splendor across the clear vault of the star-flecked sky. He heard the swash of the waves on the beach where Jarl Paul's longships lay in their sheds, and nearer at hand, the skalli blazed with torches and emitted snatches of song, shouts of laughter and a low murmur of many voices. But what attracted his principal attention was a huddled form on the hump of a burial hough in one corner of the churchyard. He knew that it was a man, and while he could see neither face nor gestures nor hear a voice, he received an impression of deadly menace which started the hair aprickling up the nape of his neck; and he walked quickly toward the skalli, guessing the grave-watcher to be Swain Briostreip, and anxious to show his good faith toward the Jarl by avoiding him.

He had passed the hough and was nearing the skalli door when he heard running feet behind him and turned to confront the outsitter's drawn sword. Swain Briostreip was a terrible figure in that hard blue light. His eyes were starting from their sockets. His beard bristled, and the skin under it was mottled crimson. Foam slavered from his mouth and lay on his mustaches. And his breath came in tense, gasping grunts, as if he dragged it up from some reservoir in the deeps of his being.

Swain Olaf's son unsheathed his sword, and leaped away before his enemy could strike.

"There is peace betwixt us," he cried. "The Jarl has said it."

"The spirits have said contrary," sobbed Swain Briostreip, and his blade hammered upon young Swain's. "Swain shall be the bane of Swain, they say."

Swain continued to fend him off, jumping waist-high to escape a side-cut; but the whistle of the steel, the clang of the meeting blades, the savage lust which sprang up in his breast as soon as his strength was matched with the other's, all these mastered him. He shoved from his path a servant who blundered upon them from one of the out-buildings, and cast off all restraint. If it was to be, it was to be. He had not wished it nor brought it about. He had done what he could to placate the Jarl; and now that this madman insisted upon the death of one of them, he decided it should not be his.

The frightened servant ran screaming into the skalli.

"Swain fights Swain!" he cried.

Dimly, Swain Olaf's son heard the clatter of upset benches, the babbling of dozens of maudlin voices, the stumbling of unsteady feet; but all the time the fore-part of his wits was intent upon the gleaming blade that swung at the end of Swain Briostreip's sinewy arm. Mad and evil the outsitter might be, but he was one of the best men-at-arms in the Northern Isles, and he had cunning and skill and long practise to pit against young Swain's untapped resources and steady eye and nerve.

The outcry in the hall grew louder, and Swain Olaf's son realized that if he was to slay his enemy he must act quickly. Once the Jarl reached them they would be forced apart.

He disengaged his blade, and stepped back.

"You have no stone to try this time, Swain ale-drinker," he mocked.

The sorcerer snarled an incoherent answer from his foam-flecked beard, and rushed to close quarters. The first chopping stroke Swain Olaf's son guarded, and he bent, as if beneath the power of the blow, until his left hand scraped the ground. When he stood erect he held a handful of dirt, which he tossed deliberately in Swain Briostreip's eyes. The outsitter staggered back, cursing, his fingers clawing at smarting pupils, and Swain Olaf's son calmly measured the distance, and slashed at the black-bearded throat.

The van of the feasters from the skalli

were stopped in the doorway by the thump of Swain Briostreip's head at their feet. It lay there on the stone step, tortured eyes still blinking, as Jarl Paul pushed into the front rank.

"Who has done this?" he demanded.

Men looked at one another. The steading was deserted; Swain Olaf's son had dodged around the corner of the skalli, and he lurked there, within hearing, but out of sight, to discover the reception his deed encountered.

"Who has done this?" the Jarl asked a second time, and the trembling servingman was propelled before him.

"It was Swain," mumbled the varlet.

"Swain? What Swain?"

"Swain fought with Swain, lord."

"Swain Olaf's son?"

"Yes, lord."

Jarl Paul's mild face became passionate with fury.

"It is time this youngling was taught a lesson," he cried. "Not an hour gone I ordered him on pain of my displeasure to give up his quarrel with Swain Briostreip—and he went from my presence and straightway slew him! He shall pay me a stiff price for that—not blood-money, but outlawry."

Some men murmured against this, but others spoke up, saying that the killing had been done on Yule night, between the Jarl's skalli and the church, and in defiance of the Jarl's express command. And Jarl Paul refused to lessen the severity of his sentence, reinforced in the conviction of his justice by the approval of the majority of his friends.

"Let all here take note," he added. "Swain Olaf's son is an outlaw. He stays in these islands at his peril. And I visit this punishment upon him the more rigorously because I should have applied it equally to Swain Briostreip had the issue been different."

VIII

SWAIN, having heard all this, took counsel with himself, and sought the house of a friend, from whom he borrowed a horse. By this means he rode across the island to Rennadal, where he took ship for Gairsey, and was first to carry news of his outlawry to his family.

Asleif received the tale with a heavy countenance.

"I was prepared to have my son go forth to slay an outlaw, and now I hear that he is himself an outlaw, to be hunted, and perhaps, slain!" she exclaimed.

"There will be others slain, first, then," said Gunni. "We have plenty of brave fellows here, and more will come from Caithness at need. Swain can snap his fingers in the Jarl's beard."

"No, that would not be wise," answered Swain. "It is best that I should go viking for a season, but I see no reason why I should hasten unduly."

His mother regarded him intently.

"You have a plan, my son?"

He nodded.

"I am going to Bishop William at Egilsey. Jarl Paul, himself, told me the bishop was no friend of Swain Briostreip, and it is my thought that he will aid me."

"That is a wise thought," approved Asleif. "Also, the bishop was my mother's cousin, and on friendly terms with us. I will go with you, and we will make trial what he can do to relieve your troubles."

"And while I am at Egilsey," said Swain to Gunni, "do you run out the dragon Jarl Paul gave me and pass the word that if any restless men desire to try Winter viking they are like to have the opportunity."

"That will I," promised Gunni.

Asleif and Swain reached Egilsey that day, and Bishop William entertained them kindly. He was an honorable man, of much power, and he did not hesitate to congratulate Swain upon his having slain Swain Briostreip.

"It is a good riddance," he said. "The man was a turbulent fellow, always in broils, and he never tired of mocking at the church. He is where he should be. Do not concern yourself about it, Swain. You had better stay here in my house, where none will harm you, until I have composed the matter with the Jarl."

Jarl Paul was very wroth when he first heard that Bishop William had taken Swain under his protection, but several of the chiefs came forward and pointed out that Swain's family had been amongst his strongest supporters in the trouble with Rognvald, and he was constrained at length to agree that Swain should have all the time necessary to man and equip the dragonship, *Deathbringer*, muster a crew and make plans for the comfort of his mother and brother. More than this he would not do, not even to the extent of appointing a time-limit to Swain's outlawry.

"Let us see what he does," he said when Bishop William pressed him for more lenience. "He is a sudden young man."

"He is a better friend than foe," replied the bishop.

"Whatever he is, he is no longer my friend," snapped the Jarl.

When this was repeated to Swain he thought for a while, and said:

"Now I am free entirely to do as I please. I am no longer Jarl Paul's man. Hereafter I shall fight for my own hand always, no matter who is jarl or where I may be, for I see that it is power and not good intentions which carry a man to success."

"That is not always so," argued the bishop.

"It is so more often than not," answered Swain.

At the end of the Yule season he had made his preparations, and he said good-by to his mother and Gunni and steered *Deathbringer* out of Aurrida Firth westward and south to the Sudreyar. There he wintered in great comfort, receiving recruits constantly from the young men who had heard of his exploits, and in the Spring he embarked upon the first of the viking cruises which made his name a terror in all those seas and for hundreds of miles southward in France and Spain and the Moorish countries by Njorfasund.* Nor did he forget his pledge of vengeance against Frakork and Olvir Rosta, but they evaded him for the time-being by taking service with the Scots king in Apardion† where he could not come at them. The tale of his vengeance is the tale of his life and must be told in its own place.

But as for the manner and why and wherefor of his going a-viking, instead of biding quietly at home for at least half the year and contenting himself then with Summer raids in Ireland and England, they were all as set down here. It was because of a stone, but men have argued ceaselessly which was the first stone that raddled the pool of his life. Certainly, it was not the stone called Swain's Stone. That played its part, but it only carried farther the ripples already started. Perhaps the first stone to be accounted for was Frakork's weaving of the poisoned shirt for Jarl Paul, which Jarl Harald wore, and which sent Frakork and Olvir Rosta to Morkaorsbakki and Swain Briostreip to Dungelsbae. But what stone stirred the pool before that stone? No man knows.

---

*Straits of Gibraltar.
†Aberdeen.

M'BIAM

by Thomas Samson Miller

SWEARING innocence by M'biam is a common thing on the Niger. If a black is sick his wives take M'biam drink—a non-poisonous concoction, and recite:

> "If I have been guilty of this crime,
> If I have sought the sick one's hurt,
> Or sent another to seek his hurt;
> If I have made charm,
> Or employed another to make charm,
> Or to put anything in his road,
> Or to touch his cloth,
> Or to touch his yams;
> If I have prayed for his hurt,
> Or had thought to hurt him in my heart;
> If I had intention to hurt him—
> If ever, at any time, I did any of these things,
> Then, M'biam! Deal thou with me."

Thus the oath, as near as it can be translated.

If analyzed it will be found to suggest occult things, as for instance, you can hurt an enemy by having the thought to hurt in your heart. That belief is common even among civilized peoples.

To "touch his cloth," hints at the sympathetic magic which is believed in by all primitive peoples, and behind the whole oath is the force which we now know as auto-suggestion.

The solemnity of the oath, the conviction of those taking it that in the case of guilt; the mysterious *Ju-Ju* will strike the guilty one dead makes it efficacious.

9 EAST*

by Robert Russell Strang

Author of "The Sourdough Twins Last Cleanup," "Maloney and Malotte, Partnairs," etc.

THE last hundred feet of level 9 East in the Slope Mine is now a sealed chamber. A three-foot wall of brick and mortar shuts it off from the rest of the mine. That jagged rectangle is as black as the coal which bounds it on three sides. Doubtless once in a while a drop of water seeps through the roof from Hungry Lake and drives an ineffectual hole through the terrible quietness. Nevermore will the menace in 9 East threaten the lives of the miners of Anthravale.

In all ages the belief has not lacked converts that a commerce of communication exists between the living and the spirits of the departed; and, furthermore, that temporary materialization of the latter was not uncommon. But until proof of a character beyond question is forthcoming, the incident that took place in 9 East will have to be placed in a category with the thousand and one other inexplicable affairs which in times past have briefly illuminated the strip of purple mist men have designated the bourne.

Jara Meiklejohn, the shot-lighter, was not a man to be doubted. He was one who had spent almost half of his life underground. A big, kindly and silent man; a thinker and builder of dreams, a man trusted by miners and management alike. And even if the words of the three coal-diggers are set aside, there is still Morton Bradley's sketch. Bradley was a mining-engineer of national repute and a dollar-a-year man during the war. Not at all the sort who fall asleep with their eyes open and "see" things.

Whence came that face he drew?

Much has been written about those who go down to the sea in ships; little about those who descend into the bowels of the earth in skips and cages, to pick and blast out the black diamonds which turn the wheels of industry.

Nearly all the European languages were spoken in Anthravale. The foreign element of the population lived in rows of little cottages on one side of the railroad tracks; Americans and their institutions throve on the other side.

At the crossing were No. 1 mine, the company's offices, machine shops and storehouses. Distant about a mile and a half from the town, and about an equal distance apart, were four other mines. This included the Slope, whose coal was largely drawn from beneath Hungry Lake, a large, silent sheet of water bounded by low, drab hills.

Old Jamie Ramsay had been mine boss of the Slope since the day the first pick was stuck in it twenty-five years before. He had grown up with it; knew when anything ailed it and the remedy therefor; could, if the need arose, have found his way through its long dark avenues and narrow cross-cuts blindfolded. A sniff of gas in a stall and up went the bar on which was chalked "KEEP OUT." Nor did it take him half a day to discover where the air was leaking. He had the nose of a hound for a loose bradish board.

---

* *This is an Off-the-Trail Story. See first contents page.*

The levels, inclines, cross-cuts and stalls in the Slope coal mine were the veins in Old Jamie Ramsay's heart.

For a quarter of a century Old Jamie and Anthony Graham, the mine superintendent, had worked together in harmony, and each day smoked a pipe at the foot of Ram's Incline, from which point it was the superintendent's custom to entrain for the pithead. For one thing, both belonged to the old type who had gained their knowledge in the hard school; were the sons of miners and, from early boyhood, had spent their days in the mines.

With the passing on of Anthony Graham times changed. A man by the name of Manly Bremerton, a man who belonged to the new order of things, became superintendent. He inaugurated the entrance upon his new duties by pointing out to Old Jamie Ramsay the innumerable mistakes that had been made in the development of the Slope Mine, and wound up by reducing him to the rank of a mere foreman over the company men, who worked by the day's wage, as distinguished from the coal-diggers who worked by the ton.

"Mister," replied Old Jamie on that occasion, "there's never been a life lost in the Slope through fault of mine. I have tried my best, and succeeded, in holding an even scale between the miners and the company. If a couple of men who I knew were good diggers couldn't make living wages in a place I added footage to their tonnage. We've never had any trouble——"

Manly Bremerton waved this aside.

"In future the company cost of putting a ton of coal on top will have to be reduced," he declared. "Your organization of company men are either inefficient or lazy—maybe both. Do a little stirring up and sifting. Likely as not you know the drones in your squad—out with them!"

"You're mistaken, mister," retorted Old Jamie. "What a few of them lack in speed is amply made up for in know-how. My company gang keeps the Slope running as smooth as the hoisting-engine. When men are contented with their employment——"

"Just carry out my orders. Sift out the has-been and never-was element, and reapportion the work accordingly."

The superintendent turned away.

"The mine has to be manned!" Old Jamie objected.

To this Manly Bremerton vouchsafed no reply.

The old mine boss went about his work as heretofore, but he was a disgruntled man. He let not a single man go. A number of men along in years, but good men nevertheless, were turned off over his head. Although miserable, it never entered his head to quit. The Slope was his mine. A fire of resentment started to smolder within him.

One day he walked into the office of the superintendent and suggested that he stop development work in level 9 East.

"I've got a *feeling*," said he in a strangely diffident tone, "that if we shoot much more coal out of that level we'll break through into Hungry Lake, which would mean the flooding of all the mines and the loss of at least fifteen hundred lives——"

"You've got a feeling," sneered Manly Bremerton, reaching for a survey of that level. "That's rich. You should have been a mine boss in the days of Solomon!"

"Maybe I was," muttered Old Jamie in an odd impersonal tone.

Manly Bremerton eyed him sharply. The mine boss had a far-away look in his eye. He turned impatiently to the survey, studied it carefully for a few minutes.

"Your feeling," he at length announced, "has no basis in fact. At this moment there's sixty-two feet of rock between the roof of the level at the face, and the bottom of the lake. The coal seam in that direction is practically level, and I don't look for a fault. 9 East is going clear across under the lake."

"It never will!" quoth Old Jamie as he turned away.

ON THE second morning thereafter the two men met in the breast of 9 East. Nick Lurich, stripped to the waist, was tamping a hole. At his feet lay Toni Zaccarelli, his partner, who was engaged undermining with his pick that portion of the face presently to be shot out. The slightest movement of a lamp in the chamber gave startling life to a host of uncanny shadows. Ugly, sinister faces peered from the crevices. The heavy props, viewed against the brassy lights, became massive knights in black armor. One of these, unable to bear its burden, burst with a loud report—and became matchwood. Manly Bremerton stepped away a few paces. Old

Jamie leaned his pick-handle walking-stick against an empty car, calmly took the lamp from his cap and snuffed it with a horseshoe-nail—the same which he had carried in a pocket of his vest for many years.

He replaced the lamp in his cap and reached for his stick.

"I'm telling you," he stated in an ominously quiet voice, "there's goin' to be no more shots fired in 9 East!"

"You're a bad guesser——"

"For the past ten days I've sensed danger every time I've come into this level," broke in Old Jamie passionately, "and the nearer I come to the breast the stronger becomes the feeling. Right at this minute I sense it more acutely than ever before! Mister, an old miner is in possession of a great deal of knowledge that you won't find in books. Nothing in life could give me more pleasure than to wall off this end of the level, brick by brick, with my own hands——"

Manly Bremerton raised his safety lamp and held it to one side of Old Jamie's face, the better to examine it.

"I don't think it's whisky," he said. "Nerves, more likely. But go on, right through to the finish—maybe I'll know by that time."

If the mine boss heard these words, he did not betray the fact, but went on:

"I've lost a lot of sleep over this, and what I'm going to tell you may sound like nonsense. But I've learned to trust my feelings, sense, judgment—whatever you like to call it. I could tell you how my hunches have saved lives in the past. But let that pass. Last night in bed—I couldn't at this minute swear whether I was awake or asleep at the time, or just between the two—I saw a deep hole the shape of a funnel directly above the breast—*there!*"

Old Jamie pointed his pick-handle at the roof above the head of Nick Lurich. His dark eyes glowed like live coals, his nostrils were dilated, and his thin gray beard shook. His dramatic gesture took Manly Bremerton by surprize. He glanced sharply from Old Jamie to the roof above the breast, then back again. He drew a sharp breath, laughed shortly, and the least mite uneasily.

"What —— nonsense is this!" he exclaimed. "I think you're positively crazy——"

"You don't understand, and maybe you never will!" cried Old Jamie with scorn. "The Slope is my pit. I drilled the first hole in the seam and fired the first shot! I've put my life into this mine. It was my monument till you came along with your reputation for getting out cheap coal—as if that wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do! But what of the mine and the men? You would spoil the Slope, ruin my mine! But I tell you I'd rise out of my grave to defend it. These shots will never be fired!"

"Well, you are—right now! Make your stay in the mine as short as possible!"

Manly Bremerton wheeled and started down the level, his safety-lamp twinkling like a star in a black sky. Presently he lifted a curtain and passed beyond.

With a hand that trembled Old Jamie once more snuffed his lamp, a trick of his by reason of which he could marshal the thoughts bearing upon a certain problem more quickly.

Tony Zaccarelli dropped his pick and sprang to his feet. Nick Lurich dropped his tamping-bar. They conversed in whispers and gestures for a few moments. Tony at length stepped up to the old mine boss.

"Boss Jeemy," he quavered, "you think dat de roof it is not safe?"

"It isn't safe, Tony."

Old Jamie took up his pick-handle and started down the level.

"Ah have de small wife and de beeg family!" cried Tony after him. "Ah guess ah queet!"

"Me too!" seconded Nick Lurich, "though," he added for Tony's benefit only, "Ah have needer de beeg family nor de small wife. We put our tools in dees empty car, Tony, huh?"

"Sure t'ing! Boss Jeemy he know what she talk about."

They returned to the breast. Nick began to pull the fuses from the holes, Tony to gather up the tools.

Beyond the first curtain Old Jamie came to a pause and stared down a long, straight, narrow slope, at the foot of which gleamed an electric light, and he said in a low tone—

"Jara, meet me at the entrance to 9 East."

A command he repeated three times before resuming his way.

Twenty minutes later Old Jamie arrived at the place of assignation and seated himself on a pile of stringers. Jara Meiklejohn the shot-lighter arrived a few minutes later.

"I was in 3 West when I got your call," he observed casually, "or I might have got here sooner."

He, too, seated himself on the pile of stringers.

Old Jamie took the lamp from his cap and began to snuff it. A train of empty cars rumbled past and disappeared down the Slope, the rope-rider, seated in the last car, bawling "My Old Kentucky Home," at the top of his voice, the flame from the lamp in his cap trailing a full yard behind him.

"It's all off, Jara," observed Old Jamie at length.

"Is that so, Jamie. That roof back there, I suppose?"

Jara indicated 9 East with a jerk of his head. Old Jamie nodded. They fell silent.

These two men had been lifelong buddies. Neither had ever been boys—cared nothing for play. At the age of thirteen, at a time when both were trapper-boys in the old Conboy Mine, long since abandoned, they had inaugurated the custom of walking around Hungry Lake of a Sunday, a practice still adhered to, no matter what the state of the weather. In the beginning they had much to say to each other, but this had worn off with the passing years. They had arrived at the pass where articulation was scarcely necessary.

Both were well-read men. At first there had been a lot of groping, much waste of time over books that got them nowhere, but at length they had got on the right track, as they termed it. While each was complement to the other, Old Jamie was the master mind.

"For some days now I've known how it would wind up," stated Old Jamie quietly. "For the sake of the mine I held myself in check. In a way I'm glad it has come. *Now*, I don't think these shots in there will ever be fired."

Nick Lurich and Tony Zaccarelli arrived at the mouth of the level, gave greeting to Old Jamie and Jara, then started up the Slope.

"I won't light them," returned Jara simply. "Margaret will take the news hard."

"I'm positively afraid to tell her, Jara. Her heart——"

He said no more.

A trip of full cars came thundering up the Slope. On the beam of the first one stood the rope-rider, his watchful eye on the swinging cable. Old Jamie rose and made a signal with his lamp. The rope-rider took a nail from his cap and touched the wire above his head with it which caused a bell to ring in the engine-room. The train slowed down. Old Jamie stepped on to the bumpers of the last car, then waved his lamp. The train resumed its way almost immediately.

An hour later Nick Lurich and Tony Zaccarelli entered the bar-room of one Mike Rossi. There they discovered the two men who cross-shifted them in 9 East. With many a lifted eyebrow, shoulder shrug and passionate gesture they told of the conversation between the mine boss and superintendent, and its result as concerned themselves.

A crowd gathered about them. Again and again the story was repeated, nor lost it any magic thereby. At length it passed from lip to lip on both sides of the railroad tracks.

By seven o'clock that night every miner in Anthravale knew of the danger that lurked in the breast of 9 East. At eight the following notice was painted on the bulletin board in the Union Hall—

KEEP OUT OF BREAST IN 9 EAST

Although Old Jamie could have secured a ride on a coal-train back to town, he preferred to walk. At the office he passed in his time-book and was handed his pay-envelop. On his way home through the new town, this one and that one stopped to commiserate with him, for already the news was abroad that he had been discharged.

An ominous silence greeted him as he stepped over his own threshold. Presently he discovered Margaret, his lifelong partner, lying lifeless in the hall beneath the telephone-stand. Some gossip had been beforehand with the news that he had been fired.

Three days later Mrs. Ramsay was laid to rest beside Rob, her son, who had met his death at the age of twenty when a rope-rider in the Slope; the cable, when the train hit a low place, having cast a loop about his body.

The Sunday following Old Jamie and Jara Meiklejohn took their last walk around Hungry Lake.

"I think it would kill me to stay in Anthravale another week," the old mine boss confided to his friend. "My feet would be taking me down the track to the Slope. There I would see the trips of coal come up out of my mine—I couldn't stand it, Jara. Then, too, it's so lonesome in the house—I'll sell out and go West just as soon as I can."

The sorrow of Jara Meiklejohn was beyond speech.

"For me," Old Jamie went on, bitterly, "the sun will never shine again— 'Reproach hath broken my heart'—'They gave me gall for my meat; in my thirst, vinegar.' "

Old Jamie turned his night-black eyes on Jara and exclaimed:

" 'But whosoever believeth on me though he were dead, yet shall he live.' Is it not so, Jara?"

In that moment Old Jamie had the look of one inspired.

"It is so," returned Jara.

A week later Old Jamie boarded a westbound train at Pittsburgh. Jara was on hand to bid him good-by.

"Do you think you'll ever come back, Jimmy?" he queried.

"That will all depend—" began Old Jamie slowly.

"But the Slope—9 East?" Jara prodded him.

"I don't know—I can't tell—" Old Jamie became greatly agitated. "If anybody should go to fire a shot in 9 East I don't believe even the grave could hold me back, Jara!"

The train began to move. The friends shook hands without a word. Jara departed; the train gathered speed; Old Jamie settled himself in his seat and closed his eyes.

In the days and weeks that followed the management offered liberal inducements to diggers to go to work in the breast of 9 East, but without success. That place was blacklisted. The faith of the men in the judgment of Old Jamie Ramsay was a fine tribute. Strangers looking for work were offered the place, accepted it, but never showed up in that level.

Manly Bremerton at length abandoned the idea of extending 9 East—for the present anyway. But he swore that he would live to see the day when some of those men who had refused the place would beg to be allowed to go to work in 9 East. In many ways an excellent executive Manly Bremerton was, notwithstanding, but an indifferent judge of human nature. According to his philosophy, a wage-earner was a biped capable of performing a certain amount of labor, in a given number of hours, for a stated number of dollars. The human element escaped him.

Old-timers and their families began to move away from Anthravale.

For almost three months Old Jamie Ramsay wandered from one coal-mining community to another. From Pennsylvania he went directly to Illinois; crossed over into Kentucky, down to Alabama, west to Colorado, to Utah, to Washington. Not a single camp could he find that suited him. In Renton, near Seattle, he heard of a camp on Vancouver Island where coal was mined from beneath a lake by way of a slope, and was on his way thither next day.

Old Jamie's first view of this camp brought a sort of balm to his spirit. He nevermore expected to be contented with life as he had known it in Anthravale, but here he felt certain it would be less intolerable to him than in any other mining-camp he had yet seen. The idea of settling down in any other sort of a town never even entered his head. Once a coal-miner, always a coal-miner.

He rented a batcher's cabin near the lake, furnished it and settled down. The view from his little porch commanded the tipple, and he could see every trip of coal that came up the Slope. Chinatown was a scant half-mile distant, the white settlement a mile.

In those first days he took no notice of the one-legged Chinaman who occupied the cabin fifty feet from his own, but a terrier which a man had sold him in Seattle hated the sight of the Celestial, as most white men's dogs do. So for some days Wong Fu considered it as much as his life was worth to venture forth into his little garden.

WONG FU was a very old Chinaman who lived in constant dread of being spirited away by his countrymen and dispatched post-haste to the hereafter, the loss of a limb being considered justification sufficient for such action. And without doubt such would have been the fate meted out to him within twenty-four hours after the accident, had it not been for the local missionary and the white man whose helper he had been in the mine for many years.

Minus a limb he dared not return to his own country or travel about in this one. In so far as his own countrymen were concerned, therefore, Wong Fu was a pariah, and several other things which, in their own language, meant a great deal more. But the local Chinese had been warned by the white miners that if anything violent overtook Wong Fu, Chinatown would be put to the torch. For four years the old Chinaman had led a very lonely life indeed.

After Old Jamie had familiarized himself with his surroundings he noticed Wong Fu's predicament, slapped the terrier and taught him to leave their neighbor alone. And because Wong Fu loved his garden, in consideration of Old Jamie's thoughtfulness he appeared at the back-door of his cabin that night, and tendered him a basketful of his choicest vegetables and flowers.

"Plesant foh you," he explained.

Old Jamie bent his gaze upon the leathery countenance of Wong Fu. For a long minute they stared at each other, eye to eye; seemed to recognize one another. Old Jamie changed his mind about handing the other a piece of silver, and gave the old Chinaman his hand instead. At which act the leathery face creased, the scarred head bent low.

They exchanged names. Old Jamie invited Wong Fu to a seat on a bench, and the old Chinaman poured into his ear the history of the camp.

Next day Old Jamie applied to the superintendent for a job. Not that he needed the money, for in a bank in Seattle he had deposited drafts amounting to $9,000, but that work he felt certain was necessary to his well-being.

The superintendent outflanked Old Jamie's reticence, and at length offered him a position as fire-boss in the Slope. This being more than Old Jamie had expected, he readily accepted and went to work next morning.

When he arrived home from work that first day he found his fire going in the cabin and the kettle steaming. This pleased him mightily, and that night he made an arrangement with Wong Fu to keep house and cook for him, a measure so gratifying to the old Chinaman that he took on a new lease of life.

Ever after that, on Summer evenings they sat on the porch for long hours and conversed in low tones; in Winter within doors. The nature of their conversation no one ever knew, could not even surmise; but the missionary declared that the friendship was not only uncommon, but that the two old men had been brought together by a kinship of understanding and propinquity of spirit, as rare as it was inspiring to behold.

Every month Old Jamie received a letter from Jara Meiklejohn, and every month wrote one in reply.

Old Jamie made no other friendships in the camp. He did his work quietly and efficiently, and when his shift was over he climbed the hill to his cabin.

In this manner passed three years. To the men in the mine he seemed a man entirely contented with his lot, but Wong Fu and the terrier could have told a different story. The old man was heartsick for Anthravale and his kingdom that was the Slope Mine. And every now and again the pain occasioned by his desire, made febrile by secret brooding, was greater than he could bear, when Wong Fu, awakened by the torrent of Old Jamie's passion, would sit up in his bed and pray that peace might enter the heart of his friend. In the morning after one of those outbursts the face of the old mine boss was as placid as the lake itself.

One afternoon Old Jamie came home a sick man. After getting him to bed Wong Fu went down the hill and persuaded the weigher to telephone for the doctor. The latter came, examined him and took him back to town with him and placed him in the hospital. Pneumonia, he mentioned to the matron.

Toward morning the night nurse heard Old Jamie mutter:

" 'Mine is the faith that endureth, the faith that removeth mountains'—'Whoso believeth on me, though he were dead—yet shall he live.' "

Old Jamie Ramsay was no more.

A week later Wong Fu joined him.

A THOUSAND suns rose and set. In many parts of the country January, 1918, was one of the coldest months on record. The world war was at its height. Steel mills, ship-yards, arsenals and factories whose products were essential to its prosecution were burning coal from hand to mouth. In many cities men, women and children waited in the deep snow for hours at a time to receive their semiweekly allowance, and then were sometimes turned away without it.

In the surveyor's office of the Lake C. & C. Co., Manly Bremerton, Hurlburt the surveyor, and Morton Bradley the government expert were scanning the underground plan of the Slope Mine in search of means to increase its output. At length Morton Bradley jabbed the breast of 9 East with the point of his pencil.

"What's the matter with this place?" he inquired. "Encountered a fault?"

"No," the surveyor made answer. "I'll stake my reputation that the seam goes clear across the lake. It is, however, the highest point in the workings."

In a few words Manly Bremerton explained why work had been discontinued in 9 East.

"I'm of the opinion," he declared in conclusion, "that Old Ramsay was off his head at the time but, unfortunately, the miners thought otherwise. Superstitious, you know. At that point Hurlburt assures me there's sixty-five feet of rock between the roof and the bottom of the lake; a perfectly safe margin."

"I'll stake my reputation on that!" asserted the surveyor.

"Oh, there's not the slightest doubt in my mind but what the place is safe enough," observed Bremerton. "But how are we going to get men to mine it? I don't believe there's a digger in the State but what hasn't heard of 9 East. It's a hoodoo."

"Have a new survey made right away," ordered Morton Bradley, "and give out the news that such is taking place under my personal supervision. The Government needs the coal in that place."

"In that case," advised the superintendent, "you'd better have a little talk with Jara Meiklejohn, the shot-lighter, who, since Old Jamie went West, has more influence over the miners than any one else in the camp. If you are able to convince him that there's no danger of the mines being flooded with the waters of Hungry Lake, the rest will be easy. He's a queer old duck, but thoroughly dependable and, besides, he is familiar with every nook and cranny in the Slope. He'll be in between three and four this afternoon with his report, and I'll hold him for you."

"Do that; and—" he turned to the surveyor—"get to work on that new survey as quickly as possible."

Within the hour Hurlburt and his assistants were out on the lake with their surveying paraphernalia.

That afternoon Morton Bradley sold Jara Meiklejohn. The winning plea was patriotism. The nation needed the forty tons of coal that could, at a pinch, he asserted, be shot out of the breast of 9 East every day. Patiently he explained to Jara the industrial equivalent of that amount, how many homes it would make comfortable, how many little bodies it would keep warm.

Jara wavered. He listened for a call from Old Jamie. It came not.

"It's like this, Mr. Bradley," began Jara. "Although it isn't generally known, some fifteen or sixteen years ago the surveyor here at that time came near to running us into the lake in 3 East. It was Old Jamie Ramsay that saved the mines and miners at that time. He declared to Anthony Graham he had a hunch we'd drive up into the lake at that point. And sure enough, the Pittsburg surveyor that Anthony called in found that such would have come to pass within a week. The seam, he discovered, out-cropped in the lake at a point forty feet in from the breast.

"But I'll tell you what I'll do," Jara continued after a pause. "If after the new survey has been made you can personally assure me that the place is safe, I'll undertake to see that you have no trouble in getting men to go to work in it."

"Good. I'm just as concerned about the safety of the mines and the miners as you are. The loss of the nine thousand tons a day produced in the Anthravale district would at this time be nothing short of a national calamity. I'll let you know tomorrow."

Shortly thereafter Bradley requested the superintendent to issue an order to have air directed into 9 East and the place conditioned for the mining of coal at an early date.

That night Jara Meiklejohn went down to the miners' hall and engaged the union officials in a lengthy conversation. The result of this was a notice on the bulletin board to the effect that a new survey of 9 East was being made; that if after checking this up the Government expert declared the place to be safe, the union would give its sanction to a crew to go to work there as soon as the place was ready.

Forty-eight hours later Morton Bradley gave out that 9 East was perfectly safe. The place having been got ready in the interim, a crew who had just completed a crosscut in 12 West were enjoined to report for work there next day.

Shortly thereafter Morton Bradley received a call over the long distance telephone from Washington, requesting his presence at a conference in the capital next morning at nine.

On being complimented upon his health, energy and spirits Morton Bradley was wont to reply that he could not afford to be otherwise. But that night in his berth on the train sleep failed him entirely.

Going back over the work of the past few days his mind at length alighted on the story that had to do with the hole seen by Old Jamie Ramsay in the roof above the breast in 9 East, and on this his mind continued to dwell against his will. As he continued to turn from one side to the other he involuntarily caught himself wondering what sort of a man the old mine boss was, who had seen things in his sleep and believed them to his cost. His next step was an endeavor to visualize him, and while thus engaged he dropped off into a light sleep.

From this he woke with a start, stared into the darkness and listened. No discord could he discover in the harmony of the flying wheels beneath him. He lifted a corner of the window-shade and the night, he saw, was exceedingly dark. The train raced across a bridge. Suddenly he clapped a hand to his forehead; reached forth the other and turned on the light. He snatched a pencil and note-book from his pocket, opened the latter at random and began to draw.

As if by magic a face appeared upon the page. He closed his eyes for a few moments, opened them and glanced at the sketch.

"I've caught it!" he muttered, a note of triumph in his voice. He gazed at it for a long minute then drew a deep breath. "This is certainly a most unusual thing for me to do. What does it mean? Is it a face in the flesh or a dream-born thing?"

There being no reply to these questions, he returned the pencil and note-book to his vest pocket, turned off the light and endeavored to induce sleep again.

Scarce a minute later he jerked himself up into a sitting posture.

"It has something to do with level 9 East in the Slope!" he exclaimed in a puzzled voice. "I saw it again just as plain as day!"

Once more he turned on the light and critically inspected the face he had drawn in his note-book. The eyes held him. The fancy crossed his mind that they were trying to convey a message to him. In one moment they glinted with the light of command; in the next were overshadowed with despair; in the one after that the white seemed to show all around the pupils, and horror itself returned his look. This went on for some minutes.

In the moment after once more returning the note-book to its place there leaped into his mind a picture of Hungry Lake. This was superseded a moment later by a picture of the breast in level 9 East as he had seen it the morning before. To him, in the state of mind the sketch had brought about, the connection was obvious.

"Rubbish!" he muttered, and thereupon tried to banish the whole matter from his mind.

He lighted a cigaret, willed himself to think about something else. What was yesterday's coal output for the entire country?

Here is the reply:

"The coal seam in the Slope is nearer the surface by several hundred feet than in the other mines of the district, and 9 East is the shallowest level in the mine. If—let us suppose—that after the shots are fired Hungry Lake breaks through, what will be the result? One after another the five mines will be flooded and every miner on the morning shift drowned—say two thousand men! At a time when the country needs every ounce of coal that can be mined, it would suddenly be faced with a curtailment of nine thousand tons per day. Is it worth the risk?"

He lighted and smoked another cigaret.

"I'll wire Bremerton," he suddenly decided, "to have a diver examine the lake bottom directly above 9 East, first thing in the morning."

He glanced at his watch. It was one-thirty. He rose and dressed. As he was leaving the Pullman with the intention of taking a seat in the smoker until the next stop, there was a sudden grinding of brakes, and the train began to slow down. A brakeman emerged from the car ahead.

"How long do we stop here?" Bradley inquired.

"You've got me, mister; I don't even know why we are being held up. We don't stop here usually——"

While speaking he had opened one side of the vestibule and let down the steps. Bradley followed him to the ground.

"This is a burg named Shelton," announced the brakeman, after a glance down the track.

"I'm going to take a chance and send a telegram from here," cried Bradley, already on his way to the little depot.

When he arrived at the station-door he almost collided with the conductor who was coming out. And what he was saying about telegraphers in general, and one in particular, was unfit to print. He signaled the engineer, then started across the platform on the run.

"Have I time to send a wire!" cried Bradley.

Even as he spoke the train began to move; the conductor leaped aboard. The chance was open for Bradley to do likewise. He hesitated, and thus forfeited it. He stepped into the waiting-room and up to the ticket-window. Within he beheld a young man stamping up and down in great agitation, then pausing and staring malignantly at the telegraph instrument on his desk.

"If that don't beat old Harry!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" inquired Bradley.

"Matter!" he echoed, turning his head to eye the speaker. "Matter enough! Half an hour ago I received an order to hold up No. 10 and report her in for instructions. When I do that they want to know what'n —— I'm talking about! Swore up and down they never sent me any such order. Yet there it is in black and white just as I took it."

He touched with his finger the top paper on a file.

Morton Bradley was not a man easily shocked. But when he grasped the full significance of the telegrapher's tale of wo, a tremor of dread passed over him. Without a word he reached for a telegraph blank, wrote out his order to Bremerton and shoved it through the wicket to the clerk.

"Send that right away!" he requested.

While this was being attended to Bradley thoughtfully paced the little waiting-room. When the telegrapher was once more at leisure he asked him at what time the next train came along, and was informed that no train would stop at Shelton until five forty-five.

"Can I hire a car to take me up to Scott Junction?" he inquired after a hurried glance at the time-table.

"I don't know— There's Solly Bowen. He'd say he'd take you there in his flivver, and would try to, but—well, he doesn't get that far very often without a breakdown. Anyway, in this weather it would take him about an hour to get his Lizzie warmed up. If you want to get there that bad you can hop on to a freight that will stop here for a little while around three-thirty——"

"That will be fine! And if I happen to be asleep when she pulls in, give me a yank, will you?"

"Sure."

Bradley stretched himself on a slatted bench and closed his eyes. Without, the night was still; within, just the *tick-a-tick* of the telegraph instrument. An expert at the key himself, he lay there idly piecing the words of this and that message together. Suddenly he sat up and listened for a few moments. With a muttered exclamation of horror he swung to his feet and jumped to the ticket-window.

"Did I hear right?" he fired at the telegrapher, who was in the act of getting up from the instrument. "Was that Number 10 that piled up——"

"*Ain't it* ——*!*" raved the clerk. "Gosh, mister, I'll say there's somebody watching over you this night!"

Morton Bradley shivered as if a draft of icy air had passed over him. The thought crossed his mind that *his* world within these few hours had turned and repudiated his authority; severed the power-wire of his influence; good-naturedly ordered him to stand to one side and see how a little world could order its own affairs in a crisis. He was no longer a traffic officer, just a dummy at the wheel of a flivver waiting for that gentleman's permission to go.

He felt as if his heart had suddenly been plunged into a vessel of ice water. He seated himself beside the stove. By and by his hand wandered to his vest pocket. He withdrew the note-book and stared at the face he had drawn on the train.

"Thank you for saving my life, old fellow," he said to the face. "I think I understand, *now*."

He got up and dispatched a second telegram to Manly Bremerton, then inquired about a train back to Pittsburgh.

"PUT a diver to work in lake over breast of 9 East this A.M." read the superintendent. "Search for hole. Bradley."

He glared about his office.

"Am I never to hear the end of that level?" he fairly shouted. "Has he, too, gone mad like Old Ramsay!"

He consulted his watch, which told him it was eight-fifteen. He rang for the surveyor.

"And the men went to work in that place over an hour ago," he snorted. "Pshaw! It's all right."

Hurlburt entered. Bremerton handed him Bradley's telegram.

"I'll stake my reputation—" began Hurlburt, after a glance at it.

"Go call up that diver in Pittsburgh and get him on the job the quickest way you can think of—" Hurlburt hurried away—"and if anybody ever mentions 9 East to me again——"

He paced the floor for a minute, then settled himself at his desk.

The surveyor was in luck with regard to the diver. He was about to go down the river to examine the hull of a steamboat. Hurlburt commandeered him in the name of the Government.

The diver and his assistant arrived in Anthravale by auto an hour later. They were driven immediately to the lake where a small tug awaited them. They steamed out and anchored between two of a number of red buoys. The diver, having got into his suit on the way across, was presently being lowered to the bottom of Hungry Lake by his assistant.

A few minutes later Morton Bradley arrived in a launch. He had broken the speed laws every foot of the way from Pittsburgh.

"How goes it?" he asked Hurlburt.

"I'll stake my reputation," he declared, "that my original survey was right. We'll know in a few minutes."

Bradley began to pace the deck of the tug with short quick strides.

"Coal will win the war!" was the slogan of the nation about this time. The weapons of the army engaged in the production of this vital necessity were cutting-machines, crow-bars, tampers, picks and shovels. Like their brothers at the front they placed no little faith in powder.

Smoke was never so thick on the Western Front as it was in our coal mines. In the dim, yellow rays from their lamps the half-naked miners toiled and sweated like men of another world. This army, too, had to contend with gas, the Silent Death. The rumble of shots was always in the men's ears. The dust-laden air was quite capable of exploding without warning and snuffing out a thousand lives. In the Slope Mine there was the added danger from water.

Like the army at the front this one never faltered. The corporal's guard of it in the breast of 9 East finished tamping their holes and sat down to await the arrival of the shot-lighter.

"What you think *now*, Tony?" Nick Lurich asked one of his partners. "Do we get de big bath or fifteen tons of coal?"

"Ah don' know," replied Tony, spitting out a mouthful of coal dust. "Ah have de beeg familee. Ah no like get killed. But if de boys at de Front take a chance wit' flying lead—" he shrugged his shoulder—"we can take one wit' quick water."

* * *

"WHAT does it read, Hurlburt?" asked Bradley sharply.

The line fell from the surveyor's quaking hands to the deck. He turned a white face to his interrogator.

"One hundred and eighty-eight feet, four inches," he replied in a husky voice.

"And the last reading was a hundred and thirty something!"

Bradley wheeled on the diver—

"Did you discover a hole down there?"

"A sort of a shelving cave with a narrow opening—" began the diver.

But Bradley waited to hear no more. He sprang over the side into the launch, which was presently forging shoreward toward a point near the mouth of the Slope.

Fifteen minutes later he sprang ashore. At the entrance to the Slope he encountered the superintendent, who was on his daily tour of inspection. In a few words Bradley acquainted him with the discovery made by the diver.

Bremerton dropped his lamp and sprang to the telephone-box a rod away; called up the pumping-station nearest to the entrance to 9 East, and asked the tender if Jara Meiklejohn had yet passed into that level. After receiving a reply to this he ordered the pump-man to sound the alarm, then hung up the receiver with a groan.

"The shot-lighter went into 9 East twenty minutes ago. It will take him just a few minutes more to reach the breast! There's a chance in a million——"

He broke off, raced to the telephone and sent in a general alarm to the office; a second to the engineer at the Slope-tipple. The siren at the latter place was the first to shriek; presently the air was filled with a deafening tumult of sounds.

A string of empty cars raced down from the tipple. It slowed down momentarily at the mouth of the Slope. Bradley, Bremerton and the rope-rider swung aboard, and the train raced madly into the darkness.

Within five minutes thereafter every man, woman and child in Anthravale able to run, walk or crawl was on the way to one or the other of the mines. The worst, they surmised, had happened; the menace had materialized; Hungry Lake had broken through into the Slope and flooded all the mines.

The hoisting-engineers at the various mines girded themselves for the onset, for when the fleeing men began to arrive at the shaft bottoms, theirs would be the task to get those on top who had beat the flood. *Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!* snorted the exhausts of the big engines, their enormous fly-wheels running so smoothly they scarcely seemed to turn.

The train of cars on which rode Bradley and Bremerton was stopped at the entrance to 9 East, and, being immediately possessed by a mob of panic-stricken miners, shot away up the Slope again.

Bradley and Bremerton raced on into the level, hoping against hope that the shot-lighter had found fault with the manner in which the holes had been drilled, and refused to fire them; that a chance rock from the roof of the level had laid him out—or any of one of the hundred varieties of accidents that can happen to a man in a coal mine had prevented him from reaching the breast.

Passing under a curtain some distance in they almost collided with three flying figures, whom they endeavored to stop. They might as well have tried to stop three fear-ridden lions. They dived under the curtain and disappeared.

"I guess the worst has happened!" gasped Bremerton. "That is the crew that went to work in the breast this morning."

Nevertheless, they took up the running again, nor stopped until they had passed through the last curtain. Here they were confronted by Jara Meiklejohn, the shot-lighter.

"Did you fire those shots?" Bradley and Bremerton asked him in one breath.

"No," the shot-lighter made answer, "I did not. When within ten feet of the face I was suddenly confronted by Old Jamie Ramsay and a Chinaman. Old Jamie commanded me not to light them. For a moment or two I thought I was dreaming. I turned with the intention of asking the miners if they saw what I did. There was no need to ask. They were already this far, and yelling their heads off. When I looked toward the breast again Old Jamie and the Chinaman had vanished. I pulled the fuses."

The three men looked from one to the other.

"Tomorrow," stated Bremerton at length, "this place is going to be walled up."

He wheeled and started down the level.

Bradley took a note-book from his pocket, opened it and handed it to Jara Meiklejohn.

"Does that face look like any one you know?" he asked—then held his breath.

The shot-lighter raised his safety-lamp and glanced at the bust of a man on the page of the note-book. Slowly his face lighted up.

"It does," he made answer. "It's a living likeness of Old Jamie Ramsay the last time I saw him."

ONE YOUNG, ONE WIDOW, ONE OLD

By Thomas Topham

BY ALL the laws of Arctic navigation, Captain Eph Ross shouldn't have had his vessel so far north on the Greenland Coast late in the season, but he was tempted by the lure of a fat bonus for unloading supplies for a party of scientists and engineers. Also he was ignorant of the north and refused to heed the warnings of his mate.

While the unloading was in progress one of the hands from his vessel gave a couple of Eskimos a half-dozen sugar-coated gum-drops made out of rubber, which brought on a big row at the Eskimo settlement. An old Eskimo not being able to chew his allotment, swallowed them whole, and there was much speculation on board the ship as to what would happen to him. The other chewed industriously, and making no impression, enlisted the aid of a friend, who also chewed without success.

Almost every Eskimo present took a whirl at the trick gum-drops, to the intense joy of the sailor who had perpetrated the outrage, and the whole settlement came to the conclusion that everybody on board the *Annie Ross* was a swindler.

Captain Ross, who didn't know much about the people who inhabit the northern regions, was amused at the disgusted Eskimos, but his mate, Mr. Timmons, was deeply irritated. He called the offending sailor before him and reproached him severely for joking with Eskimos.

"Don't never play no practical jokes with them birds," admonished the mate. "They take everything seriously. Gum-drops is their chief delight in life, an' none of them Eskimos who've been a-chewin' on that rubber will never have no more confidence in gum-drops. An' besides they'll do us dirt, because even if you did give 'em them gum-drops an' not sell 'em, they think they've been buncoed."

The sailor promised and withdrew. Mr. Timmons was speaking from a profound knowledge of Eskimos, having spent a winter above seventy-seven with a Polar expedition, during which he had acquired a talking acquaintance with their language, a disgust for their food and a deep respect for their odors.

Captain Ross got the supplies unloaded and also obtained information that at an Eskimo settlement a little farther north a party of natives had brought in a large amount of narwhal ivory. To trade for it was poaching, but he thought he could successfully consummate the deal, and despite warnings of Mr. Timmons, who told him bluntly he ought to be going straight south, he put out, determined to get the ivory. He got it, but the ice got him, and the skipper realized too late that the ice pack was around him like a ring of howling wolves, driving him north and further north.

That he could get north instead of south astonished the skipper, as it had done many another ship master in times gone by. He knew vaguely that the ice-pack was supposed to drive steadily south at that season. It was rank treachery on the part of the pack, but he was neatly caught in one of the many traps that the Arctic lays for the unwary and ignorant. Having encountered a few icebergs in the Atlantic,

---

"One Young, One Widow, One Old," copyright, 1923, by Thomas Topham.

Captain Ross thought he knew ice when he accepted his mission to the north.

Captain Eph stood on the deck with his mate and wept tears of rage that ran down into his whiskers and formed icicles. He wept tears of agony when he tried to tear the icicles out of his beard, but he restrained an intense desire to curse, which was against his religious convictions. Mr. Timmons was so angry at the captain for getting them caught he would have willingly harpooned him if it would have got them out. Having no religious convictions himself, he expressed his feelings in profane language.

The old man had been fooling with a pair of binoculars, but he couldn't make them work because his breath froze too fast, so he went below to swab them in alcohol. A lead in the ice showed up aft and the mate swung the old *Annie Ross* about and headed for it. It filled so fast, however, that the ship struck almost solid ice with a jar that put everything on end. He had been doing that for two days in the vain hope of getting through. The jar brought Captain Eph tumbling up again with his binoculars. The mate was having a hard time getting the *Annie Ross* around after hitting the ice.

"Mr. Timmons, you'll sink her doin' that," the skipper observed, "or else pile her up a wreck on the ice."

"I know it," the mate spit back angrily, "but I don't want to spend a Winter up here. As first mate I've got a little interest in this ship myself."

"Mr. Timmons," reproved the skipper severely, "we've had some narrow escapes, but by trustin' in Providence we've not been froze in yet."

"You are *now*," declared Mr. Timmons, "an' froze in good."

Captain Eph looked all around the waste of tumbling ice and water. A fierce wind was coming from the southward and all the leads opened to the north. The wind piled up tons and tons of crunching ice that would heave up and drop with a roar like heavy artillery. The ship was compelled to take the most available lead, with the chance there would be none to take in a very short time.

The captain finished his survey.

"Do you know where we are?" he asked his mate.

"Yes," answered the mate, heavy sarcasm in his voice, "somewhere's off the coast of Greenland between Cape Farewell an' the North Pole. I allow we've been makin' about fourteen or fifteen knots a day north for several days, what with backin' up an' takin' a crack at the ice now an' then to see if it's gittin' thicker."

Ordinarily Captain Eph would have handed his mate a warm retort, but the predicament he was in had temporarily broken his peppery spirit. He didn't like this fresh mate of his, had never liked him. Only the fact that Mr. Timmons had had experience in northern navigation had induced him to hire him when he contemplated his Greenland voyage. That Mr. Timmons was invaluable and had an uncanny eye for ice traps, he grudgingly admitted to himself, but this very faculty aroused Captain Ross' jealousy and drove him to a series of petty persecutions against the mate. When they lost headway he blamed the mate; when they made good time, he wanted better. Deep in his superstitious old soul there lurked the suspicion that the difficulties he encountered, most of which a man experienced in northern waters would have foreseen, were due to the mate being a Jonah, owing to his lack of religion. Mr. Timmons was frankly hard-boiled, hard-fisted and cockily capable.

The captain's attitude reacted on the mate, who developed a decided dislike, almost amounting to hate, for his skipper. A funeral at sea with the skipper the corpse would have pleased the mate immensely.

Captain Eph surveyed the icy ocean again. He handed the mate the glasses.

"See if that's a berg or a rock," he commanded, pointing to starboard.

By that time, though, he had fogged the glasses.

"I'm goin' below an' thaw my gloves," said the mate, "an' when I git back I'll take a look."

"Wait," ordered the skipper. "That's land over there. I could see it plain."

"If it's land, an' you're sure it's land," said the mate, "we'd better drive her that way an' git in the lee of that berg or rock you think you saw. That's where we'll spend the Winter."

"Mr. Timmons," asked the captain, "wouldn't you consider there is the slightest possibility of gittin' out? It would not be a very pleasant way for a woman to spend the Winter, an' I'm afraid my wife will object. Mightn't the pack break if the wind veers?"

"Not now," said the mate, unsympathetically. "That's what I told you when you insisted on goin' ahead to make that ivory trade. Anyway, it ain't my fault you brought Mrs. Cap Eph along."

"Young man," rasped a female voice behind the mate, "it was me insisted on makin' that trade. We're a-goin' to git out, because I ain't a-goin' to stay up in this no-man's land all Winter."

"Uh-huh," replied the mate, regarding the woman sardonically. That was another thing he had against the skipper, allowing this strong-minded, bossy wife of his, whom he had married in a weak-minded moment ashore, to come on a northern voyage.

"Now, now, my dear," the captain soothed his wife, "we'll git out, if it's humanly possible, but if not, we must make the best of it. We're in the hands of Providence."

Mrs. Cap Eph paid no attention to her husband, but she returned the mate's glare and grunted. She knew they would get out if it was humanly possible. She would see to that. Mrs. Ross was a determined woman of forty-eight years. There was no doubt that she had caught the skipper off-guard when he had just returned from a long voyage. She had insisted on making his next voyage their honeymoon trip and the prospective rigors of Greenland had failed to shake her resolution.

Cold as the weather was, the mate boiled when he heard why the skipper had insisted in the face of all warnings upon going after the narwhal ivory. Mrs. Cap Eph had done it, and now he would pay by staying up north all Winter.

"Keep her in that starboard lead an' we can make that berg or rock I pointed out," the skipper ordered.

His wife started to object, but her arguments were cut short when the vessel was caught in an ice jam and narrowly escaped destruction. The captain and his mate were so busy they failed to get her orders to turn the ship around and go back south despite ice and wind.

A few hours later the *Annie Ross* fought and crunched her way up behind a great iceberg that had anchored for the Winter. The craft hit the underwater part with a jar that almost shook out the crew's teeth.

"Full steam astern," bawled Mr. Timmons. "Port, quick, for the love of ——," and the man at the wheel saved the ship by being quick. The *Annie* slid off, rocked crazily, and floated into fairly clear water between the berg and the shore.

"Here's where we stay for —— knows how long," said the mate bitterly, and did what the skipper had done before—wept icicles into his whiskers.

He looked over at the Greenland scenery, magnificent, grand. But oh, how bleak and unfriendly, and someway, hopeless.

"Here I am," it said to him, "beautiful, but frozen solid and I'll get you if you stay."

This was going to be his home for weeks, for months, and he didn't like it.

Mrs. Cap Eph was furious when she learned they intended staying there, but Mr. Timmons was adamant and the captain was afraid to go against his judgment. The position had been picked with a master eye. The gigantic old berg behind which the vessel had slid was aground and would hold there until well after the ice broke up and the *Annie Ross* could clear.

In the mean time it would protect the vessel to some extent from the constant heaving of the ice which can crush a ship like a paper box. Even Mr. Timmons, pessimistic as he usually was, had to admit that the *Annie* would probably weather it out provided the Winter was normal.

THAT night the *Annie Ross* was frozen in solidly. The mate, who knew the dangers attendant upon freezing in, kept a watch going the rounds. Twice he dynamited the pack that was crunching in too solidly. The skipper considered his mate's precaution useless and the dynamite wasted, but as it was the ship "froze in" at a list of five degrees, which added nothing to the comfort of those on board. The next day with care, one could have walked from ship to shore.

With the ship fast in the ice, Mr. Timmons' experience in the north served him well. He waited until the ice was safe, then insisted on unloading a large amount of supplies against possible disaster to the vessel. He superintended the building of an igloo on shore in which he stored the supplies. Captain Eph considered the work useless waste and growled but was afraid to stop it.

"Git the men out in huntin' parties after walruses, bears, hares, anything, before the sun gits clear away," Mr. Timmons urged on the skipper. "We're goin' to need meat an' lots of it."

"Go ahead," the captain said, "git 'em out yourself. You got us in this jam," and he camped beside the stove in his cabin, where he listened to his wife rehearse how, if he had been a real sailor, he could have got away from the ice. Occasionally, when the mate went to the cabin for orders or to get permission to do something, Mrs. Cap Eph let fall a sneering remark, generally to the effect that on their next voyage they would take along a real mate.

But Mr. Timmons was too much concerned over his own safety to pay much attention to next voyages. The one he was on bothered him most. He organized hunting parties, offered rewards for fresh meat, put a gang at work clearing ice off the ship. All in all, he was a busy man.

Captain Eph was aroused from his lethargy by the failure of the hunting parties. With a bitter sneer at Mr. Timmons for his lack of success he undertook to head a party himself. He came back with frostbitten cheeks and no game, but returning along the shore line he found an Eskimo baby.

The mother was dead. Tucked in the pocket which all Eskimo women have in their clothes for children, was the infant, almost frozen. One of the men carried him inside his own clothing back to the ship, where he thawed out with a rapidity that astonished the crew.

The captain was furiously angry. He glared at the child as it gobbled his precious condensed milk and yelled for more. Mrs. Cap Eph took no more kindly to the Eskimo infant than her husband.

"Smells worse than whales," she declared, and said that she supposed they would have to care for him until they ran across a Government station in the Spring.

"That's what comes of makin' the captain go out huntin'," Mrs. Ross sneered at Mr. Timmons. "If folks would jest attend to their own business they'd not be gittin' other people in mix-ups."

Mr. Timmons retorted hotly that the captain could take the baby out and restore him to his dead mother if he felt so disposed.

"Anyway," wound up the mate, "it's a good thing the skipper found him, because now we know they's Eskimos around. It don't make me none too easy to have them birds hangin' around the ship."

"Eskimos is kind, gentle an' honest," said Mrs. Ross, reprovingly. "Everybody says so."

"An' simple-minded," supplemented the captain. "They'll even chew rubber gumdrops. Haw! Haw!"

"Never you mind about their simple-mindedness," retorted Mr. Timmons, darkly. "A Eskimo ain't but a little bit better-natured than a Indian an' a durn sight more sneaky. Give a Eskimo gang a ship with a few half-froze sailors on board an' I wouldn't trust 'em. Many a ship's disappeared, hull, masts an' sails, an' pieces been found in Eskimo *tupeks* later."

"Mr. Timmons," Captain Ross said firmly, "from what I've seen of Eskimos I ain't afraid of all the Eskimos under the Aurora Borealis."

"Don't trust 'em too far, that's all I ask," admonished Mr. Timmons. "Wherever these Eskimos is they know we're here, an' it's suspicious they ain't showed up. They're either layin' low because they're afraid, or else they're keepin' outa sight in hopes we'll abandon the ship an' leave it for them to loot. More likely the last."

Mr. Timmons wasted no time in starting to scout for Eskimos. With a couple of good men he followed up the coast, and there, down in a valley of ice and snow he found the settlement, if three huts could be called a settlement. The huts were constructed of rocks, old timbers, pieces of sail and dirt, showing they were used as permanent Winter quarters. Though small, the mate from his knowledge of Eskimos, decided they would hold twenty or thirty, perhaps more.

Mr. Timmons reported his find to the skipper, who hastily bundled up the Eskimo infant and prepared to return him.

"Ain't no use waitin'," declared Captain Eph with one eye on the condensed milk. "His folks is perhaps crazy about him bein' gone an' they'll want to know what became of the mother, poor woman."

THE Eskimos, as Mr. Timmons had suspected, were not caught napping. An old Eskimo was pottering about one of the huts when the captain, Mr. Timmons and a sailor hove in view, bearing the baby. He advanced and proffered an ancient-looking horn box full of dirty-looking snuff. The mate, rightly interpreting this as a sign of friendliness, accepted the snuff and bade the skipper and the sailor do likewise.

Then the mate tentatively offered a word or two in Eskimo and his host let loose a flood of words. The mate soon caught the dialect and in somewhat halting language he told the Eskimo they had found and brought back the child.

"He is the son of Kyutinguah, a great hunter," the Eskimo explained. "His father will be overjoyed to receive him."

He pointed to a tunnel leading into one of the huts and bade them enter. It was a close shave for the skipper, who was much bundled up even for the Arctic, but by dint of pulling and pushing and grunting he was shoved through.

"Gad," choked the skipper, as he hit the inside of the hut and the odors struck him fairly, "what a smell."

Old seaman that he was, he almost fainted as he sniffed the atmosphere of the room. He clapped his mittened-hands to his nose in hopes of shutting out some of the overpowering, nauseating smells, then as his eyes roved about the room, he snatched his hands from his nose and covered his eyes. For a religious man, the sight was too much. Men, women and children were without clothes except for very abbreviated breech-clouts. In one corner two mothers were industriously licking their babies for lice, and a bald-headed, toothless grandmother of many years was chewing sinew and making a terrible fuss about it.

"Make 'em put on some clothes," wailed the skipper. "Lord, what kind of people is these, anyway. Make the wimmin at least, put on their clothes."

The sailor was frankly amused. The mate, hardened by previous experience, laughed, but he spoke up quickly in Eskimo and their hosts dashed for their clothes. The skipper kept his eyes covered, and the Eskimos dressed in front of their visitors.

"Never had no idee what a wild Eskimo is like, did you skipper?" the mate asked him jocularly.

He could have told his religious skipper tales of the Eskimos' private lives that would have made his blood curdle, but he refrained. Captain Eph still complained bitterly of the smell. "Light your pipe," advised the mate, and the skipper did. By blowing the smoke through his nose, he found he could bear the odors tolerably well.

Mr. Timmons restored the child to his father. Kyutinguah was plainly pleased.

"He is a man-child and much beloved," said the Eskimo father. "All that is mine is now that of the white men."

The mate translated what the Eskimo had said. "He means it, too," the mate told the captain. "An Eskimo will come closer than any other human to givin' you all he's got. They'll steal your eye teeth one day, an' the next give 'em back an' a couple of their own."

"Tell him about the mother," urged the skipper, "an' let's git out."

The mate obeyed.

"*Problokto*," said Kyutinguah and dropped the subject.

"Crazy, northern madness," the mate translated.

The skipper wanted to launch into a long description of where he found the body and how it looked, but the mate choked him off. It wasn't the thing to do right then.

A fat and smiling woman brought the skipper a dish of food and placed it in his lap. The captain looked at it helplessly. The mate waved aside a similar dish and asked for a piece of sealskin, on which he chewed.

"Kind of messy-lookin' affair," said the skipper, but he did not want to offend his hosts and took an experimental taste. "However, mebbe it'll wear off this turrible smell."

"Go ahead, cap," the mate urged cordially, and the captain tried it again.

"Tastes better than it looks, kinda like hash with Worcestershire sauce," declared the captain, and dipped in rather heartily.

The mate watched him eat, fascinated, occasionally saying a word or two to the Eskimos.

"I ain't never had the nerve to tackle that dish," the mate observed when the skipper had almost finished. "Know what it is, Captain Eph?"

"No," replied Captain Eph, hauling up short and looking slightly startled.

"That's moss taken out of a reindeer's stomach after he's killed. It's a great delicacy up here."

The skipper looked sorrowfully at his first mate, placed his hand on his stomach and gagged.

"I've heard of that stuff," he said between gags, "but I never thought I'd git up against it— Why didn't you tell me sooner before I'd downed it all— It tastes horrible comin' up."

He gagged again and again, then got to his feet and announced that he was going.

Mr. Timmons apologized to Kuytinguah for the captain. He explained that the room was too hot for him. Kyutinguah urged them to stay. He was really very grateful for the return of his child and insisted that the captain must name some favor that he could do for him. Mr. Timmons told the captain.

"He can't do nothin' for me but let me lay off his filthy food," snapped the disgusted skipper, and looked around for the tunnel.

Mr. Timmons was on the point of leaving too, when across his mind there flashed a daring idea of getting a measure of revenge on the skipper for the months of petty persecution he had undergone. Just a joke on the skipper, a simple, harmless little joke that would make the captain miserable for a few minutes and no one need ever know. He turned to the Eskimo.

"Kyutinguah, the captain is a very great man in his country," he said in Eskimo. "He is rich and wants nothing like food or skins, but he would be greatly honored if you would give him two wives. He is able to care for them well."

A delighted smile crept over the face of Kyutinguah. Nothing could please him better than to get rid of a few women to feed during the Winter. The fish catch had not been particularly good and the white men were clearing away much of the game on which they depended. He foresaw a diet of dog meat ahead unless things improved. It was true that missionaries had been teaching them the awful sin of a man having more than one wife, and the terrible consequences of transferring wives from one to another, but secretly he discounted these teachings. He hadn't had any luck narwhal hunting since he obeyed the missionaries and refrained from burying the eye of the season's first catch, and as a result he scorned their views on other subjects.

He himself had one wife he paraded before the missionaries and three others he boasted of when the missionaries were gone. Why not? He was a famous hunter and capable of killing for more than one woman. If the white man wanted a few wives that was a matter for the great one to settle with his own missionaries, and in the mean time it would be much to his own benefit. Perhaps he could work off a few more than those demanded.

"I will give him one, two, three, four, five," said Kyutinguah, enthusiastically. "Tell the great one so."

Mr. Timmons felt a qualm at the earnestness of the Eskimo. He had intended only to scare the skipper. The other Eskimos set up a jabbering over the proposal that indicated some excitement under the northern lights.

"What is it?" demanded the skipper, sensing that something important had been said, jerking at the mate's sleeve.

"This is a —— of a howdy-do," replied the mate seriously. "Kyutinguah, who's a great hunter and a leader of his gang, says he's bound to give you five wives for your great service in saving his child's life. He says——"

"What?" yelled the skipper, a look of terrible surprize coming over his frost-bitten old face.

Kyutinguah, watching the skipper, judged from the look of anger that the great one was annoyed because he had not been generous enough.

"Six," he said quickly, raising the fingers of one hand and one on the other, so there would be no mistake.

"——, he's raised his bid," the mate told Captain Eph. "He makes it six."

"I'll have none of his dirty wimmen," declared the skipper indignantly. "I'm a God-fearin' member of the church an' I have one wife now, which heaven knows is plenty."

The captain took the offer so seriously, was so terribly shocked, that Mr. Timmons decided he would prolong his agony.

"Listen," he said to the skipper in a serious voice. "This bird's a half-breed an' a pretty dangerous citizen. He's got fifteen men an' almost twice that many wimmin here, an' the chances are, if you make him sore, he'll undertake to grab the ship an' all that's in it. You can't judge Eskimos up here by the ones you run across down in the settlements."

The skipper frothed and fumed.

"Not a one," he swore determinedly. "You don't suppose my wife'd let me take them wimmin on board."

"Three," said the mate to Kyutinguah, who was hovering about, anxious over the deal and not understanding the delay. "The great one says he'll take three. Trot out one an' let's see her."

The mate hoped that a sight of his prospective wives would drive the captain frantic.

Kyutinguah talked fast to the women. There was a rush to be honored, but he wanted to make no mistakes. The big eaters were the ones whom he wished to bestow upon this crazy great one who was willing to feed women.

He selected as his first choice a youthful girl. Killituk was fat and greasy and could and did consume vast quantities of food. Killituk stepped forth, smiled winningly, she thought, and indicated a desire to show the visitors what she would look like as a bathing beauty. Mr. Timmons hastily stopped this proceeding.

"He's bound you gotta take 'em," the mate told Captain Eph, "an' this is his first candidate."

The skipper gave a dazed look at the damsel and clawed for the tunnel.

"You take 'em," the skipper ordered. "You got me into this mess anyway, what with your talkin' Eskimo an' all."

The mate chuckled and was ready to let the captain go and rely upon his wit to explain to Kyutinguah, but the skipper turned at the tunnel.

"It's all your fault," he yelled hotly, "an' if I could git rid of you I'd fire you this minute."

Right there the captain cooked his goose to a crisp.

Mr. Timmons cast a cold eye at the skipper and decided that he was going to have a lesson that would last him a lifetime. The captain, even then, might have got away, but his too bunglesome clothes caused him to stick in the tunnel. Mr. Timmons hauled him back.

"Listen to reason," said Mr. Timmons. "You don't have to marry 'em. They don't do no marryin' up here. They jest cart the lady off. But if we git out alive you've got to take these Eskimo ladies along an' git rid of 'em later. It's goin' to mortally offend these guys if you turn 'em down when they think they're a-payin' you a great honor. I wouldn't give two cents for your ship."

"It's your bounden duty, captain," put in the sailor, who was frightened at the prospect. "Do it, captain, an' save our lives an' trust to luck to jettison 'em later."

Kyutinguah was none too pleased at the evident quarrel of the white men. Evidently the great one was very angry over something. He stood looking surlily at the skipper, while surrounding him was an evil-smelling, evil-looking crew of savage men.

The skipper clawed his whiskers and hesitated. Life was sweet, he valued his ship, he even valued his wife if the truth were told. He made one last feeble objection.

"Mebbe I could be stuck for bigamy," he said earnestly. "You wouldn't want to see me in the penitentiary?"

The mate wouldn't have cared if the captain were in two penitentiaries at once.

"Douse me lights," said Mr. Timmons, profanely, "if I can see what you're makin' such a fuss over. 'Taint like you're a-marryin' 'em for sure. Nobody'd hold this legal."

Mr. Timmons nodded at Kyutinguah. "That one'll do, chief."

"If you think it best," the skipper capitulated, "I'll take 'em over to the ship, but remember, I say it here before witnesses, I ain't marryin' none of 'em. You'll have to square it with Mrs. Ross, tell her they've been hired to sew skin clothes or somethin'. You tell that to that old Eskimo. I'll feed 'em for the Winter just to keep the peace, but they ain't my wives by law of God or man."

"Trot out another," Mr. Timmons heartlessly directed the Eskimo. "The great one is very particular."

Kyutinguah looked over his bunch of women carefully. He selected a middle-aged widow, who couldn't have starred in a Follies show.

"This one," explained Kyutinguah, "she can chew the *kamiks* very excellently. She can make all manner of skin clothes, having had five husbands. She will be an excellent worker for the great one."

Mr. Timmons seriously explained all this to the skipper.

"Well, if I got to take 'em it won't do no harm to have a good skinclothes seamstress around," replied Captain Eph, trying to make the best bargain he could out of a serious difficulty. "But two's enough. Think of what they'll eat. Here I was, a-tryin' to git rid of one kid, an' I accumulate a bunch of husky eatin' wimmin, all because you has to dip in with a lotta Eskimo talk. My idee was to leave the kid at the door an' beat it."

"Next," said Mr. Timmons in Eskimo and Kyutinguah played his trump card.

He brought forth the old woman, baldheaded, toothless, claw-fingered.

"No you don't," bawled Captain Eph, taking a horrified look at the old woman. "She don't come on my ship."

Mr. Timmons wasn't much impressed by the old woman himself. In fact, he was surprized that she had not been pushed off an ice cliff several years before. It was, however, a good chance to make the skipper stew. Kyutinguah could see that the great one was not particular about his third candidate and plunged into a description of her virtues.

"No teeth," said Kyutinguah proudly, sticking his dirty fingers in the woman's mouth. "She can suck sinew like no other in the camp, otherwise she would have been dealt with. In carving spears she has no superior, and men travel days to drink the coffee that she brews."

The mate translated for Captain Eph.

"I won't," declared the skipper determinedly. "I ain't no use for sinew an' I don't want no spears carved an' I can make my own coffee. She don't come on my ship."

"Kyutinguah, show the great one a spear she has carved," directed Mr. Timmons in Eskimo.

Kyutinguah grabbed a spear and smiled as he rushed up to the skipper. An Eskimo's forced smile is nothing to make any one comfortable.

"Look out," yelled the mate. "He's mad because you refused the lady."

"Oh, I'll take her," said the skipper hastily, and headed for the tunnel. "Git them wimmin an' herd 'em along to the ship if we've got to."

"Wait a minute," said the mate, deciding that the joke had gone far enough and perhaps a little too far.

Mr. Timmons spouted Eskimo at Kyutinguah, explaining that he had been playing a great joke on the captain, and that the captain could not, under any circumstances, accept any wives. He might as well have talked to an iceberg. Kyutinguah drew himself up in a very dignified manner and looked puzzled.

"The great one has accepted these women," he said. "I can not withdraw my gift."

Mr. Timmons, very earnestly, undertook again to explain to Kuytinguah just what a joke meant and the utter impossibility of Captain Ross accepting three wives. It wasn't done in polite society, he assured the Eskimo. He had had his laugh on the skipper, he was much obliged to Kyutinguah, and they would now go, leaving the women behind. Later he would give Kyutinguah much tobacco.

Other Eskimos became interested and crowded around. Kyutinguah became excited. Something was very wrong. The crazy white man was working some kind of a swindle, of that he was certain, and he did not propose to stand for it.

"The great one demanded and accepted these women," declared Kyutinguah, the thought never entering his head that Mr. Timmons might not have been a truthful interpreter. "He has them. Very well. If they are not acceptable, you may select three more."

Mr. Timmons realized with a start of horror that Captain Eph had three very dirty Eskimo women on his hands. He himself did not relish having them on shipboard, but there seemed nothing else to do. He hesitated, trying to think up an appeal to place before Kyutinguah.

"Well, come on," said Captain Eph testily.

Mr. Timmons sighed and resigned the captain to his fate. He ducked into the tunnel after the skipper. The three women followed obediently.

Kyutinguah, observing that he had won, graciously offered to drive the party back to the ship. With much snarling a dog team was hitched and they went back in style. Mrs. Cap Eph greeted the strange-looking outfit with mixed emotions. She went straight *problokto* when she learned from Mr. Timmons that the women were to stay. Captain Eph ungallantly locked himself in his cabin.

"We've got to have them," the mate told Mrs. Cap Eph firmly, cursing himself under his breath for his foolishness. "It was hard work to hire 'em, but we must have the proper clothes to stay up in this country."

Mrs. Ross approached and one whiff of the Eskimos drove her into retreat and fury.

"They don't stay on my ship," she declared. "They'll smell up the whole place."

Mr. Timmons decided that diplomacy would be necessary.

"Mrs. Cap Eph," he argued, "one reason we bring 'em along is to make you a sealskin coat, an' we thought you'd like to have 'em handy so you could superintend the job. They don't know much about styles."

Mrs. Cap Eph considered this aspect and was somewhat mollified between the sealskin coat and the prospect of having three women to boss. She ordered out the crew and superintended the construction of a shed on the deck. This the men lined with old sails and when a stove was erected it was fairly comfortable, more comfortable, in fact, than anything the women had ever known. Captain Eph was routed out of his sanctuary and made to get some blankets, after which he grudgingly donated a quantity of spoiled supplies that he had been too stingy to throw away. Thus equipped the three Eskimo women were prepared to spend an enjoyable Winter.

Captain Eph was determined that his acquisitions must pay for their board.

"Get out some huntin' parties," he ordered the mate, "an' trade in all the skins you can. If them wimmin can sew skin clothes we'll make up a lot an' take 'em down the coast when the ice breaks an' sell 'em."

"Yuh risk our lives up in this frozen country to make a few dollars," retorted the mate. "It ain't no joke huntin' up here. Why, jest git a rip in your pants an' the chances are you're froze before you can stuff something into it."

But he did send some parties which came back with frosted feet and frozen ears and caused the skipper so much trouble that he desisted from his mercantile designs.

TIME began to drag as the awful Winter darkness came on and the days grew shorter and shorter. There came blizzards and fair weather and terrible gales that shook the ship even in its icy foundation. Great masses of ice began to accumulate on the bows of the ship and Captain Ross ordered out the crew to chop them off. The skipper watched the men at their work awhile, then decided that it would be pleasant to exercise his blood into warmth.

"Gimme an ax," he commanded, but they were all in use.

"There's a good ax down in my cabin," said the mate and the skipper started away.

Too late Mr. Timmons recollected that he had left his private diary, with which he had been whiling away the Winter hours, lying open on his rude desk beneath a burning lamp. He started after the captain.

When Mr. Timmons reached the cabin he could see the skipper within. He had found the ax and the diary too, and was bending over the desk. The mate watched breathlessly as the skipper swung the lamp about to get a better view.

The skipper's lips moved as he read:

> Oct. 2—Snowing. Terrible wind. Everybody shipbound.
>
> Oct. 3—Cleared. Captain Ross found Eskimo baby alive. Mother dead. Brought it to ship. Got well. Mrs. Cap Eph very angry.
>
> Oct. 4—Found Eskimo camp. Captain Ross and myself took baby to Eskimo camp, found father. Captain Ross married three Eskimo ladies, brought them to ship. One young, one widow, one old.
>
> Oct. 5—Captain Ross fixed up Eskimo wives comfortably for Winter. Provided them with sewing. Terrible blizzard. Two of men very sick.

"Good Lord," moaned the captain, and stopped reading. A terrible fear seized him that his wife would find the diary. With an oath that was foreign to the habits of a lifetime he ripped the offending pages from the book, and having his gloves tied on tightly, chewed the pages to pieces. Then he dropped to his knees.

"Oh Lord," he prayed, "deliver me outa the hands of these heathen wimmin, an' Lord, when thou hast disposed of these wimmin as thou see fit, deliver unto me bound hand and foot a mate by the name of Timmons, an' let me deal with him, Lord, like David of old did unto the enemies of the Lord——"

The mate listened no further. He skipped back to his ice chopping, leaving the skipper praying. Shivers chased themselves down the mate's spine and he wondered what David did unto the enemies of the Lord—something pretty tough, he imagined. The skipper soon came back to the ice chopping with pieces of chewed paper hanging in his whiskers. He promptly and loudly reproached the mate for allowing the ice to get so thick on the ship, but said nothing about the diary. The mate watched him keenly, fearing a slip of the ax that would appear accidental but be fatal.

Captain Eph redoubled his persecution of the mate after the diary incident. He kept him on the go constantly, he found fault with his work, he even attempted to have the mate take up his abode on land. Mr. Timmons fought back with the only weapons he had—sly references to the captain's three Eskimo "wives"—references that the skipper understood and that he was afraid would arouse his wife's suspicions.

The captain was particularly sensitive about Killituk, young, fat and greasy.

"Captain Eph," said Mr. Timmons one day as Killituk appeared on deck, "Killituk wants to know why she doesn't find favor in your sight. She says you haven't even looked once in her direction since she came on board an' she's pinin' to fix you up a mess of reindeer moss."

"I don't want none of her —— moss!" replied the skipper, gagging. "Jest tell her that once for all."

Mr. Timmons talked to Killituk.

"The great one says that he is going to increase your allowance of biscuit and butter," he told the girl. "He is afraid you will get thin."

The damsel smiled and ran up to the skipper to express her thanks.

"What's she want?" demanded the skipper surlily, trying to shoo her off.

"She says she's your lawful wife," replied Mr. Timmons, maliciously, which brought a horrified squawk from Captain Eph.

"Tell that hussy," howled the captain, "that she ain't my wife. ——, why did I do it even to save the ship! I'll end up by puttin' poison in their feed, that's what I'll do—add murder to my sins."

He went to his cabin in a rage.

LIFE on board the *Annie Ross* dragged on monotonously, freezingly. Great was the joy of all when two hardy missionaries, coming down from the North after visiting Eskimo camps, arrived to claim their hospitality. In the strange way that news travels in the northern wilderness, they had heard that the ship was frozen in and had made straight for it, passing up the Eskimo settlement to get a warm shelter and white men's food. The skipper could do nothing else but welcome them. One spoke fairly good English.

Captain Eph sweated in an agony of apprehension that Mr. Timmons would expose his plurality of marriages. He explained elaborately to the missionaries that he had hired the three Eskimo women to make them Arctic clothes and insisted upon showing the things they had made. The missionaries were not much interested—such things were common in the north. Together the three held religious services and Captain Eph made an excellent impression on the visitors, who were surprized and grateful to find a religious man in the frozen North.

Mrs. Cap Eph was confined to the cabin by a pair of badly swollen feet, acquired by her insistence in trying to measure the ice to see if Mr. Timmons had lied about its thickness. The missionaries provided her with seal fat to rub on them, which greatly relieved her sufferings.

The missionaries were loath to leave the comfortable ship, but it was their duty to visit the Eskimo settlement, give the inhabitants their yearly religious bath, baptize the babies and marry the parents, some of whom, in the absence of missionaries, neglected that ceremony.

They came back to the ship for their things boiling angry. The Eskimos had cheerfully filled their ears with the tale of Captain Eph's wives.

"You loud-praying old hypocrite," said the irate English-speaking missionary, "to come up here and marry three simple-minded women—marrying them wholesale, so to speak. Your example will ruin our work for years. We've been trying to teach them that one wife is all they're allowed, and here you come along——"

"I didn't. I didn't," protested the skipper. "They aint——"

"You did, you dirty old heathen! Kyutinguah told us all about it. If I could I'd have you arrested and anyhow I'll report you to the American consul and the President of the United States."

Captain Eph wiped drops of sweat off his nose and attempted to explain, but his explanations fell on deaf ears. Boiled down, he had to admit that it sounded bad. The missionaries packed their belongings and shook the snow of the ship *Annie Ross* off their moccasins. Captain Eph danced in anger at their refusal to believe him and thanked the stars that his wife's feet were frozen and she couldn't hear.

The missionaries had brought along Kyutinguah to take the women back, but he refused pointblank and the women refused to go, religion or no religion. Kyutinguah pointed out that the old woman could be pushed from a cliff if the great one wished to reduce his feed bill, which he gathered was the main part of the argument.

Mrs. Cap Eph got in on the tail-end of the row, just enough to whet her curiosity. Seal fat having proved efficacious on her feet, she had heard the loud talking and had donned a pair of soft moccasins in which she succeeded in reaching the deck as the missionaries were casting off.

Captain Eph refused to enlighten her as to the trouble, and Mr. Timmons was afraid to. Mr. Timmons had privately resolved that he would visit the Eskimo camp and through the missionaries, attempt another explanation, but Mrs. Cap Eph forestalled him. She straightway followed the missionaries over to the Eskimo settlement. Captain Eph's frantic appeals only hardened her resolution.

Mrs. Cap Eph got the straight of the story, at least she was told that her husband had married three Eskimo women. At first she was tempted to wreck the settlement, but she desisted. Instead she sent a messenger back to the ship to order Captain Ross and his mate to attend her.

The Eskimo runner arrived breathless.

"The great one's white woman is very angry," said the Eskimo, and poured out a string of language, the burden of which was that unless they accompanied him quickly the whole Polar region would be one great riot. Mr. Timmons demurred, but Captain Ross asserted his authority. He intended to see it out, now that the storm had broken.

They wriggled through the tunnel and found Mrs. Cap Eph sitting on a sleeping-bench holding court and her nose, with two frightened missionaries and a number of cowed Eskimos surrounding her.

"So," said Mrs. Cap Eph, "you have married three Eskimo ladies. I suppose you intend to adopt their methods and push me off a cliff."

"Before God," replied the captain earnestly, "I ain't never married none of 'em. I only took 'em to the ship because them Eskimos threatened to kill us all."

Mr. Timmons did some rapid thinking. He didn't dare confess that he had attempted a joke, but he did dare call Kyutinguah a liar. It seemed to him that he had better stick to the skipper.

"I ain't never heard nothin' about the skipper a-marryin' none of these beauties," he declared, "but Kyutinguah insisted we hire 'em to make skin clothes."

A great wave of gratitude toward the mate for his unexpected defense swept over Captain Ross. The mate could have utterly destroyed him at that moment, he believed, by a rehearsal of the negotiations regarding his enforced wives. It flashed over him that he had been harsh with Mr. Timmons; unjust, his conscience said, at times when the mate was performing prodigies of seamanship under trying conditions.

The mate's remarks, translated to Kyutinguah, knocked him completely flat. He arose gallantly and broke into an eloquent oration, Mr. Timmons talked in English and Eskimo, and the missionaries talked in a mixture of English, Eskimo, Swedish and Danish. Mrs. Cap Eph for once was outtalked.

At last Kyutinguah realized that the argument was going against him and attempted to adopt the age-old policy of a compromise. He regarded both the captain and Mr. Timmons as dirty swindlers. He gained the floor, and with a dig at the skipper for allowing a woman to dictate to him how many wives he should have, he declared generously that he would transfer two of the Eskimo women from Captain Eph and bestow them upon the mate. The great one could keep the other, which, with the white woman, would make him and the mate even.

"No you don't," yelled Mr. Timmons, falling over the lamp-stove in his excitement, and he ducked for the tunnel, but Mrs. Cap Eph grimly barred the way.

She wanted to know what Kyutinguah had said. Mr. Timmons angrily refused to translate the Eskimo's oration. The English-speaking missionary undertook that delicate mission.

"He said the great one should not allow his white woman to be so bossy," translated the missionary, at which Mrs. Cap Eph's fury mounted. "He thinks a man is entitled to as many wives as he can kill for. So he'll transfer two wives to Mr. Timmons but he says the captain must keep the other one. But I warn you, Mrs. Ross, that if Captain Ross or Mr. Timmons accept any such plan I'll see that they answer to the authorities."

Mrs. Cap Eph looked daggers at the missionary, at the Eskimos and at the miserable captain and his mate.

"Captain Eph Ross," she stormed, "did you, or did you not marry them wimmin?"

Captain Eph cleared a husky throat.

"I did not," he began. "It was this way. That old Eskimo there, mebbe thought I was, but I wasn't, havin' stated specifically——"

"Kyutinguah says you did," put in the missionary.

"Keep outa this," snapped Mrs. Cap Eph. "This is mine and Captain Ross's row, an' I'll thank you to attend to your own business."

The wilted missionary subsided. Mrs. Cap Eph turned her fury back to the captain.

"Listen to me, Eph Ross," she directed at her husband, "I don't believe you actually thought you was marryin' them wimmin, but the Eskimos did. You got yourself in a sweet-scented mess, an' I ain't a-goin' to pull you out. All I got to say is that you an' Mr. Timmons there has got to git them wimmen off the ship. An' you don't come back to stay on that ship until them wimmin goes."

With which ultimatum Mrs. Cap Eph uprose haughtily and made for the tunnel.

Captain Eph miserably regarded the disappearing feet of his wife as she crawled out. The situation seemed to have resolved itself into an *impasse.* The mate knew exactly what he intended to do with his two wives, but he wasn't sure about the captain's. He was on the point of suggesting his plan to Captain Eph, when the skipper heaved a tremendous sigh.

"What a mess, what a mess," said the skipper, disconsolately. "I'd give half the old *Annie Ross* over there to be out of it."

Mr. Timmons, with a solution on the tip of his tongue that he had intended offering free of charge, hastily checked himself.

"What's that?" he asked quickly.

Captain Eph clawed his whiskers and glanced uneasily at the mate.

"I said I'd be willin' to give a fourth interest in the old *Annie Ross* to be shut of this mess," he amended hastily.

"A fourth?" asked the mate. "I thought you said a half. But do you mean it?"

Captain Eph regarded his mate anxiously. He might make a big mistake either way he jumped. Mr. Timmons, he realized, was a very resourceful man and a shrewd one. For instance, his quick defense a few moments before when the skipper's whole future hung on his words. He could do worse than have the hard-sailing, capable Mr. Timmons as a partner, especially if he made more northern voyages where the profits were good. As the situation appeared in his eyes, the ship stood him a total loss, for he was convinced that his wife would never let him on board again unless he fulfilled her conditions, no, not if he had to live and die in that northern wilderness. She was a very determined woman. His thoughts of his wife decided him.

"I'm a man of my word," said Captain Eph. "You git us outa this mess, an' satisfy my wife, an' a fourth of the *Annie Ross* is yours. We'll sail her cahoots."

Mr. Timmons knew that his skipper was a man of his word. Whatever his other failings, the skipper did what he said he would do.

"Jest repeat that to the missionary there," said the mate. "I know you'll do it if you say so, but it's best to have a witness. An' if you mean it, I've got a little stake I'll pitch in on the deal if we git the *Annie* outa the ice."

The revelation that the mate was financially sound swung the balance with a finality for the skipper. That was something he had been seeking for years—a mate with money. Captain Eph hastily and earnestly repeated his promise.

"Come along," said Mr. Timmons, jauntily. "This scheme may not work, but it's worth trying."

He turned to Kyutinguah.

"Something is going to happen," he told Kyutinguah in Eskimo, "but don't git mad and I'll bring you over a rifle and much ammunition and much tobacco."

He pushed the captain toward the tunnel, where he laboriously shoved him through.

Mrs. Cap Eph had been expecting them. Like an admiral she walked the icy deck as the two men scrambled on board. She looked them over scornfully.

"Perhaps gentlemen," she said with bitter sarcasm, "you have come to take up your quarters back there with your wives. Shall I have your things sent up?"

The skipper wilted under the onslaught and was ready to run back to the Eskimo settlement. He looked desperately at his mate. If Mr. Timmons could settle this little affair it would be well worth the price.

Mr. Timmons had come on board with

the simple little plan in mind of bribing the Eskimo women to leave. Mrs. Cap Eph's words had the effect of driving him to fury. The three women were peeking around their cabin.

"They ain't no wives of mine, nor of the skipper's neither," he flung savagely at the captain's wife, his plan of bribery going completely out of mind in his anger.

He stalked over and grabbed the old Eskimo woman by her sealskin sacque and pitched her overboard in the snow. The widow was next, and she went over with a slosh. Killituk tried to run, but her fate was sealed. Mr. Timmons grasped the fat girl in the easiest way to swing a human being, and with a swish she hurtled through the air, across the rail, and landed head first in a snowbank, her moccasined-feet sticking up grotesquely.

"You dames beat it back to your camp," Mr. Timmons yelled after the discomfited Eskimos. *"Tieitie! Tieitie!"*

The Eskimo women dug themselves out of the snow and began waddling away to their homes. A hint was a hint to them. Captain Eph looked after them with vast surprize, and then at his mate with a great respect, mingled with a glow that came near being affection. Mr. Timmons certainly had a way with women. Even Mrs. Cap Eph couldn't give him much back talk.

"What does *'tieitie'* mean?" asked the astonished skipper.

"Hurry up," replied the mate with a grin at the skipper. "An' they'd better do it, too."

"By gosh!" said Captain Eph. "You win. But why didn't I think of that long ago?"

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Plum-Pudding and Friendship

I'LL tell you a queer yarn; and leave it to you.

I was digging in my yard, my dog chewing my hind leg. Down the road beside my shack came an old chap with a big roll of blankets upon his back. His back was stooped—partly with age, partly with the accustomed weight of packing along all his earthly belongings—his home, so to speak.

He saw me digging, and slowed down in his walk, as though about to speak.

In a moment more he was again upon his way. It occurred to me that perhaps he was hungry; the day being windy and cold. It occurred to me also that perhaps he had asked for food elsewhere and had been refused on the grounds that he was a tramp. There are folks who tell me that the tramps are social parasites. They say that one who feeds a tramp encourages men to become tramps, and to remain tramps. Well—*I'll tell you something*.

I don't give a whoop in —— what any one tells me about that sort of thing.

I've been broke and I know just how it feels to be down and out and hungry. If you want to make a man into a tramp—a tramp of the actually undesirable sort—go ahead and turn him down, there's nothing like unkindness to sour the soul of a world-weary man.

Anyway, on the impulse of the moment, I sang out, saying something or other to the old fellow that had in it a ring of friendship. The outcome of it was that he sat down to dinner with us when dinner-time came.

Where we live we call our midday meal dinner, and do not use finger-bowls.

It so happened that on that particular day my wife had made a plum-pudding for dinner. When pudding-time came, and the old party saw a plate of plum-pudding before him, he put his hands to his eyes, saying—

"I used to have plum-pudding when I was a little boy—it's too good to be true."

His old eyes were moist.

There is the yarn.

I didn't ask him why he was a tramp. It was not my business. When, shouldering his earthly belongings he proceeded on his way, he said—

"God bless you."

What more do you want?

FOMBOMBO

A FOUR-PART STORY

Part I.

by T. S. Stribling

Author of "The Web of the Sun."

IN CARACAS, Venezuela, Thomas Strawbridge called at the American consulate out of a sense of duty. The consul, a weary, tropic-shot politician from Kentucky, received his caller with gin, cigars and a jaded enthusiasm.

He glanced at Mr. Strawbridge's business card and inquired if his visitor was one of the Strawbridges of Virginia. The young man replied that he lived in Keokuk, Iowa, and that his father had moved there from somewhere East. Upon this statement the consul ventured the dictum that if any family didn't know they had come from Virginia they hadn't.

Having exhausted their native States as a topic of conversation, the talk swung around to the relatively unimportant Venezuela which sweltered outside the consulate in a drowse of endless Summer. The two Americans damned the place with lassitude but thoroughness. They condemned the character of the Venezuelan, his lack of morals, honesty, industry and initiative. The Venezuelan was too polite, he was cowardly. He had not the God-given Anglo-Saxon instinct for self-government.

But the high treason in this joint bill of complaint was that the Venezuelan was unbusinesslike.

"I'm no tin angel," proceeded Mr. Strawbridge emphatically, "but you know just as well as I do, Mr. Anderson, that the fellow who pulls slick stuff in a business deal has hit the chutes for the bowwows. Business methods and strict business honesty will win in the long run, Mr. Anderson."

The consul nodded a trifle absentmindedly at this recommendation of his nation's widely advertised virtue.

"In fact," continued Mr. Strawbridge with an effect of having started reciting some sort of creed he could not stop until he reached the end, "in fact, continual aggressive business policies coupled with an incorruptible honesty is bound to land the American exporter flat-footed on the foreign trade. And moreover, Mr. Anderson—" Strawbridge had the traveling salesman's habit of repeating a companion's name over and over in the course of a conversation so he would not forget it—"moreover, Mr. Anderson, we American traveling business men have got to set an example to these people down here; show 'em what to do and how to do it—snap, vim, go and absolute honesty."

"Yes—yes," agreed the consul still more absently.

He was holding Mr. Strawbridge's card in his fingers and apparently studying it. Presently he broke into the homily—

"Speaking of business, how do you find the gun and ammunition business in Venezuela, Mr. Strawbridge?"

"Rotten. I've hardly booked an order since I landed in the country."

"Fombombo," copyright, 1923, by T. S. Stribling.

The consul lifted his brows.

"Have you booked any at all?"

"Well, no; I haven't," admitted Strawbridge.

The consul smiled faintly and finished off his glass of gin and water.

"I thought perhaps you hadn't."

"What made you think that?"

"No one does who just passes through the country offering them to any and every merchant."

"Why not?"

"Isn't allowed."

Strawbridge stared at his consul, a very honest, blue-eyed stare.

"Not allowed! Who doesn't allow it, Mr. Anderson? Why look here!"

He straightened his back as there dawned on him the enormity of this personal infringement of his right to sell firearms whenever and wherever he found a buyer.

"Why the —— can't I sell rifles and——"

"Forbidden by the Government," interposed Mr. Anderson patly.

Strawbridge was outraged.

"Now isn't that a —— of a law! No reason at all, I suppose. Like their custom laws. They don't tax you for what you bring into this forsaken country; they tax you for the mistakes you make in saying what you've brought in. They look over your manifest and charge you for the mistakes you've made in Spanish grammar. Venezuela's correspondence course in the niceties of the Castilian tongue!"

The consul smiled wearily again.

"They have a better reason than that for forbidding rifles; revolutions. You know in this country they stage at least one revolution every forty-eight hours. The minute any Venezuelan gets hold of a gun he steps out and begins to shoot up the Government.

"If he wings the President he gets the President's place. It's a very lucrative place, very. It's about the only job in this country worth a cuss. So you see there's a big reason for forbidding the importation of arms into Venezuela."

Mr. Strawbridge drew down his lips in disgust.

"Good Lord! Ain't that rotten! When will this leather-colored crew ever get civilized? Here I am, paid my fare from New York down here just to find out nobody buys firearms in this zizzling —— hole; can't be trusted with 'em!"

In the pause at this point Mr. Anderson still twirled his guest's card. He glanced toward the front of his consulate, then toward the rear. The two Americans were alone. With his enigmatic smile still wrinkling his tropic-sagged face the consul said in a slightly lower tone—

"I didn't say no one bought firearms in Venezuela, Mr. Strawbridge; I said they were not allowed to be sold here."

"O-O-Oh, I se-e-e!"

Mr. Strawbridge's ejaculation curved up and down as enlightenment broke upon him, and he stared fixedly at his consul.

"All I meant to say was that the trade is curtailed as much as possible because it prevents bloodshed, suffering and the crimes of civil war."

Mr. Strawbridge continued his nodding and his absorbed gaze.

"But still, some of it goes on—of course."

"Naturally," nodded Strawbridge.

"I suppose," continued the consul reflectively, "that every month sees a considerable number of arms introduced into Venezuela, as far as that goes."

Strawbridge kept watching his consul as a cat watches a mouse-hole—for something edible to appear.

"Yes?" he murmured interrogatively.

"Well, there you are," finished the consul.

Strawbridge looked his disappointment.

"There I am?" he said in a pained voice. "Well, I must say I am not very far from where you started with me, am I?"

"It seems to me you are somewhat advanced," began the diplomat philosophically, "you know why you haven't sold anything up to date. You know why you can't approach a Venezuelan casually to sell him guns, as if you were offering him stoves or shoe-polish."

The consul was still smiling faintly, and now he drew a scratch-pad toward him and began making aimless marks on it after the fashion of office men.

"In fact to attempt to sell guns at all would be quite against the law as I have explained, for the reasons I have stated. It's a peculiar, and I must say an unfortunate, situation."

AS HE continued his absent-minded marking his explanation turned into a soliloquy on the Venezuelan situation.

"You may not know it, Mr. Strawbridge, but there are one or two revolutions which are chronic in Venezuela. There is one in Tachira, a State on the western border of the country. There is another up in the Rio Negro district headed by a man named Fombombo. They never cease. Every once in a while the Federal troops go out to hunt these insurrectionists, a-a-and—" the consul dragged out his "and" after the fashion of a man relating something so well known that it isn't worth while to give his words their proper accent—"a-a-and if they kill them more spring up."

His voice slumped without interest. He continued marking his pad.

"Then there are the foreign *juntas*. About every four or five years a bunch of Venezuelans go abroad, organize a filibustering expedition, come back and try to capture the Presidency. Now and then one succeeds—" the consul yawned—"then diplomatic corps here in Caracas have to get used to a different sort of—of—President."

He paused, smiling at some recollection, then added—

"So you see one can hardly blame the powers that be for wanting to keep rifles out of the country."

The young man was openly disappointed.

"Well—that's very interesting historically," he said with a mirthless smile, "and I am sure when I send in my expense account for this trip my house will be deeply interested in the historical reasons why I blew in five hundred dollars and landed nothing."

"Well, that's the state of affairs," repeated the consul with the sudden briskness of a man ending an interview. "Insurrectionists in Tachira, old Fombombo raising —— on the Rio Negro and an occasional flyer among the filibusters."

He held out his hand to tell Mr. Strawbridge good-by.

"Be glad to have you drop in on me any time, Mr. Strawbridge. Occasionally I give a little *soirée* here for Americans—send you a bid."

He was shaking hands warmly now, after the fashion of politicians; his air implied that Mr. Strawbridge's visit had been sheer delight. And Mr. Strawbridge's own business-trained cordiality picked up somewhat even under his unexpressed disappointment. In fact he was just loosing the diplomat's hand when he discovered there was a bit of paper in Mr. Anderson's palm pressing against his own. When the consul withdrew his hand he left the paper in his countryman's fingers.

"Well good-by; good luck. Don't forget to look me up again. When you leave Caracas you'd better give me your forwarding address for any mail that might come in."

The consul was walking down the tiled entrance of the consulate floating his guest out in a stream of somewhat mechanical cordiality. Strawbridge moved into the dazzling sunshine clenching the bit of paper and making confused adieux.

He walked briskly away with the quick, machine-like strides of an American drummer. After a block or two he paused in the shade of a great purple flowering shrub that gushed over the high adobe wall of some hidden garden.

Out of the direct sting of the sun he found opportunity to look into his hand. It was a sheet of the scratch pad. It bore the address—

General Adriano Fombombo
No. 27 Eschino San Dominic y Hormigas.

Inside the fold was the sentence—

This will introduce to you a very worthy young American, Mr. Thomas Strawbridge, a young man of discretion, prompt decision, strict morals and unimpeachable honesty.

It bore no signature.

Strawbridge turned it over and perused the address for upward half a minute. Now and then he looked up and down the street, then at the numbers on the houses after the fashion of a man trying to orient himself in a strange city.

II

IN CARACAS, Venezuela, an ancient usage has given names to the street corners instead of to the streets. This may have been very well in the thinly populated days of the Spanish conquest, but today this nomenclature forms a hopeless puzzle for half the natives and all the foreigners.

To Mr. Thomas Strawbridge the address on the consul's note was especially annoying. He hardly knew what to do. He could not go back and ask Mr. Anderson where was Eschino San Dolores y Hormigas because in a way there was a tacit understanding between the two men that no note had passed between them.

On the other hand Mr. Strawbridge felt instinctively that it was not good revolutionary practise to wander about the streets of Caracas inquiring of Tomas, Ricardo and Henrico the address of a well-known insurrectionary general. Still he would have to do just that thing if he carried out the business hint given him by the consul. It was annoying; it might even be dangerous; but there seemed to be no other way out of it.

It never occurred to the drummer to give the matter up. A prospect of a sale was a thing to be pursued at all hazards. So he put the note in his pocket again, got out a big silver cigar-case with his monogram flowing over one side, lit up, frowned thoughtfully at the sun-baked streets, then moved off aimlessly from his patch of shade, keeping a weather eye out for some honest, trustworthy Venezuelan who could be depended upon to betray his country in a small matter.

As the American pursued this odd quest, the usual somnolent street life of Caracas drifted past him. A train of flower-laden donkeys, prodded along by a peon boy, passed down the *calle* braying terrifically; native women in black *mantillas* glided in and out of the ancient Spanish churches which stood on almost every corner; lottery-ticket venders loitered through the streets yodeling the numbers on their tickets; naked children played in the sewer along foot-wide pavements; dark-eyed *señoritas* sat inside barred windows with a lover swinging patiently outside the bars. Banana peels, sucked oranges and mango-stones littered the *calles* from end to end and advertised the filthiness of the denizens.

All this increased in Mr. Strawbridge that feeling of mental, moral and racial superiority which surrounds every Anglo-Saxon in his contacts with other peoples. How filthy, how slow, how indecent and how immoral it all was! Naked children, lottery venders, caged girls! Evidently the girls could not be trusted to walk abroad. Strawbridge looked at them; tropical creatures with creamy skins, jet hair and dark limpid eyes, soft of contour, voice and glance.

As Strawbridge strode along with his ungainly American strides he resisted their brunette richness with a line from Kipling—"lesser breeds without the law." Yes, that was it—"lesser breeds." They were one with the donkeys and lottery venders and naked brats; they couldn't be trusted abroad. But he, Thomas Strawbridge, his women kin and kind, could be; the inborn morality of Anglo-Saxons——

A group of domino players were at a game just outside a *peluqueria*. A fifth man with a guitar leaned against a little shrine to the blessed Virgin which some pious hand had built into the masonry at the corner of the adobe. He was a graceful, sunburned fellow; and as he bent his head over his guitar during his intermittent strumming Strawbridge was surprized to see that his hair was done up like a woman's in a knot on the back of his head.

Just why the American should have picked this man out to ask for delicate information it is impossible to say. It may have been because he was leaning against a shrine, or because he showed splendid white teeth as he smiled at the varying fortunes of the players.

There is a North American superstition that a man with good teeth also possesses good morals. If one can believe the dentifrice advertisements, a good tooth-paste is a ticket to heaven. At any rate for this or some other reason the drummer moved across the *calle* and came to a stand with his own hand resting on the base of the little clay niche that sheltered the small china holy Virgin. He was so close to the man that he could smell the rank pomade on the other's knot of hair.

He stood in silence until his nearness should have established that faint feeling of fellowship which permits a question to be asked between two watchers of the same scene. Presently he inquired in a casual tone, but not loud enough for the players to hear—

"*Señor*, can you tell me where is Eschino San Dominic y Hormigas?"

The strumming paused a moment. The man with the knot of hair gave Strawbridge a brief glance out of the corners of his eyes, then resumed his desultory picking at the strings.

"How should I know where is Eschino San Dominic y Hormigas?" he answered in the same nonchalant undertone.

"I thought perhaps you were a native of this town?"

"*Pues*, you are a stranger?"

"Yes."

"An *Americano*, I would say?"

"Yes."

The strumming proceeded smoothly.

"*Señor*, in your country is it not the custom in searching for an address to inquire of the police?"

A little trickle of uneasiness went through the American's diaphragm.

"Certainly," he agreed with a faint stiffness in his undertone; "but when there is no policeman in sight one can inquire of any *gentleman*."

The man with the knot of hair muted his guitar, then lifted his hand and pointed.

"Yonder stands one two corners down, *señor*."

"Yes; *gracias, señor*."

Strawbridge had a feeling as if a path he meant to climb along a precipice had begun crumbling very gently under his feet.

"Yes; *gracias;* I'll just step down there."

He made a little show of withdrawing his attention casually from the game, glanced about, got the direction of the policeman in question, then moved off unhurriedly toward that little tan-uniformed officer.

As he went Strawbridge thought quickly of some other question to ask the police. He wondered if it would be best to go up to the officer at all or not. If he knew the man with the hair was not looking after him——

He was vaguely angry at everything and everybody; at Venezuela for making a law that would force an American salesman to go about the important function of business like a thief; at the consul for not giving him complete sailing-instructions; at himself for asking ticklish questions of a man with a wad of hair. He might have known there was something tricky about a man like that!

Then his thoughts swung around on the nation again. He began swearing mentally at the basic reason of his slightly uncomfortable position.

"—— country is not run on business principles," he carped in his thoughts. "Looks like they're not out for business; then what the —— are they out for? Why, they were all trying to pull crooked deals, overcharging, milking the customs. One honest, upright, strictly business American department store down here in Caracas would grab the business from these yellow sons of guns like a burglar taking candy from a sick baby!"

He moved along pouring the acid of a righteous indignation over his surroundings. However, he was now approaching the policeman; and he stopped insulting the Venezuelan nation to think of a plan to circumvent it.

HE WAS just beginning to debate whether he should make a show of going to the officer at all or not when he heard the thrumming of a guitar just behind him. He looked around quickly and saw that the man with the knot of hair had followed him.

Then Strawbridge realized that not only would he have to go to the policeman, but he would have to inquire for the actual address in order to maintain an appearance of innocence. Right here he lost his order! He damned his luck unhappily and was on the verge of turning across the street when the man with the knob of hair continued their conversation in the same low tone they had used.

"By the way, *señor*, I just happened to recall an errand of my own at the address you inquired for. If you care to go along with me——?"

"Why, sure," said Strawbridge, vastly relieved. He drew out a silk handkerchief and touched the moisture on his face.

"Sure; be glad to have your company."

The man began tinkling again.

"I suppose you are going to—er—to the house with the blue front?"

He lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"I'm looking for number —— I never was there before, so I don't know what color the house is."

"No?"

The guitarist lifted his brows still more. He seemed really surprized. But the next moment his attention broke away. He smote his guitar to a purpose and broke out in a bold tenor voice:

"Thine eyes are cold; thine eyes are cold to me.
Would I could kindle in their depths a flame!
I bring my heart, a bold *torero's* heart to thee——"

The American was startled at this sudden outbreak of song, but the other street loiterers took no notice of it. That is, no one except a girl inside a barred window who dropped a rose through the grills and withdrew inside. As the two men passed this spot the singer stopped for the flower and in a shaken voice murmured into the window—

"Little Heaven!"

And somewhere inside a girl laughed.

The two men walked on a few paces when the guitarist shrugged, spread a hand and said—

"They always laugh at you!"

Strawbridge stared at him.

"Who?"

"A bride—that bride—any bride."

The American had been so absorbed in the matter of the police and the street address that he had followed none of this by-play.

"A bride?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes; she married three nights ago. *Caramba!* The house was crowded and everybody was tipsy. The guests overflowed out here into the *calle*—"

He broke off to look back at the window, after a moment waved his hand guardedly, then turned around and resumed his observations.

"Don't you think there is something peculiarly attractive, well now—er—provoking in a young girl who has just been married?"

The American stared at his new acquaintance vaguely outraged.

"Why, great ——! No!"

III

THE man with the knot of hair came to a halt and pointed on a long angle across the street.

"That big blue house, *señor*. I'll come on more slowly and pass you. There is no use for two men to be seen waiting outside the door at one time."

This touch of prudence reassured Strawbridge more than any other thing the stranger could have done. The drummer nodded briskly and walked ahead of his companion toward the building indicated. It was one of a solid row of houses, all of which had stuccoed fronts and ornamental grills which mark the better class of Caracan homes. The American paused in front of the big double door and pressed a button. He waited a minute or two and pushed again.

Nothing happened. A faint breeze moved a delicate silk curtain in one of the barred windows, but beyond that the *casa* might have been empty.

The silent street of old Spanish houses, their polychrome fronts, and somewhere the soft guttural quarreling of pigeons wove a poetic mood in Strawbridge's brain. It translated itself into the thought of a huge order for his house and a rich commission for himself.

He began calculating mentally what his per cent. would be on say ten thousand cases of cartridges—or even twenty thousand. Here began a pleasant multiplication of twenty thousand by thirty-nine dollars and forty-two cents. That would be—it would be——

The sonnet of his mood was broken by the guitarist walking past him and snarling.

"*Diabolo, hombre!* You'll never get in that way! Ring once, then four short rings, then a second long, then three."

He walked on.

This brought Strawbridge back to the fact that his order had not yet reached the stage where he could count his profits. He pressed the button again, using the combination the knob-haired man had given him.

Immediately a small panel in the great door opened and framed the head of a negro sucking a mango. The head withdrew, and a moment later a whole panel in the door and a corresponding panel in the iron grill opened and admitted the drummer.

Strawbridge stepped into a cool entrance of blue flowered tiles which led into a bright patio. He looked around curiously, seeking some hint of the revolutionist in his *casa*.

"Is your master at home?" he asked of the negro.

The black wore the peculiarly stupid expression of the boors of his race. He answered in a negroid Spanish—

"No, suh; he ain't in."

"When'll he be in?"

The negro lowered his head and swung his protruding jaws from side to side, which denied all knowledge of the comings and goings of his master.

Strawbridge hesitated, speculated on the advisability of delivering his note to any such creature, finally did draw it out and stood holding it in his hand.

"Could you deliver this note to your master?"

"If de Lawd's willin' an' I lives tuh see him ag'in', *seño'*."

Strawbridge was faintly amused at such piety.

"I don't suppose the Lord will object to your delivering this note."

"No, *seño'*," agreed the black man solemnly, and Strawbridge placed the folded paper in the numskull's hands.

The creature took it, looked blankly at the address, then unfolded it and fixed his eyes on the message with the same emptiness of gaze.

"It goes to General Fombombo," explained Strawbridge.

"Gen'l Fombombo," repeated the negro as if he were memorizing an unknown name.

"Yes, and inside it says that—er—ah—it says that I am an honest man."

"A honest man."

"Yes, that's what it says."

"I thought you wuz a *Americano, seño'*."

Strawbridge looked at the negro, but his humble expression showed that he meant no guile.

"I am an American," he nodded. "Now just hand that to your master and tell him he can communicate with me at the Hotel Bolivia."

Strawbridge was about to go.

"*Si, seño'*," nodded the servant, throwing away the mango stone. "I tell him about de *Americano.* I heard about yo' country, *seño', el grand America del Norte;* so col' in the rainy season you freeze to death, so hot in the dry season you drap dead. *Si, seño'*, but evuhbody rich, dem what ain't froze to death or drap daid."

"Sounds like you'd been there," said the drummer gravely.

"I nevuh wuz, but I wish I could go. Do you need a servant in yo line of business, *señor'?*"

"I don't believe I do."

"Don't you sell things?"

"Sometimes."

"Whut, *seño'?*"

"I sell—" then, recalling the private nature of this particular prospect, he finished, "almost anything any one will buy."

This answer apparently satisfied the garrulous black, who nodded and pursued his childish curiosity.

"An' when you sell something do you have it sent from away up in *America del Norte* down here?"

"Sure."

"An' us git it?"

Strawbridge laughed.

"If you're lucky."

THE black man scratched his head at this growing complication of the drummer's sketch of the North-American export trade. Then he discovered a gap in his information.

"*Seño'*, you ain't said whut it is you sell yit?"

"That is right, agreed Strawbridge, looking at the fool a little more carefully. "I have not."

Then he added more kindly—

"A man doesn't talk his business to every one."

The negro nodded gravely.

"Dat's right, but still you are bound to talk your business somewhere to sell anybody at all, *señor.*"

"That's true," acceded the American with a dim feeling that perhaps this black fellow was not the idiot he had at first appeared.

"And how would you get paid away up there in America?" persisted the black.

The American decided to answer seriously:

"Here's the way we do it. We ship the—the goods down here and at the same time draw a draft on a bank here in Caracas. We get our pay when the goods are delivered, but the bank extends the buyer six, nine or twelve months' credit—whatever he needs. That is the accepted business method between North and South America."

The drummer was not sure the black man understood a word of this. The fellow stood scratching his head and pulling down his thick lips. Finally he said in rather better grammar—

"*Señor*, I was not thinking about the time a person had to pay in, it was how you could get paid at all."

"How I could get paid at all?"

The negro nodded humbly and his dialect grew a trifle worse.

"You see if anybody wuz to go an' put a lot of money in de banks here in Caracas, it is mos' likely de Gov'ment would snatch hit right at once."

Strawbridge came to attention and stood studying the African.

"How would the Government ever know?" he asked carefully.

"How would you ever keep 'em from knowing?" retorted the negro. "How could anybody, *seño'*, even a po' fool nigger lak me, drive a string o' ox-carts through de country loaded wid gol', drive up to the bank do', pile out sacks of gol' an' not hab eberybody in Caracas know all about it?"

The suggestion of gold, of wagon-loads of gold delivered to banks, sent a sensation through Strawbridge as if he had been a harp and some musician had struck a mighty chord. As he stood staring at the black man his mouth went slightly dry and he moistened his lips with his tongue.

"I see the trouble," he said in a queer voice.

His *vis-a-vis* nodded silently.

The negro with the mango-juice on his face and the trig white man stood studying each other in the blue entrance.

"Well," said Strawbridge at last, "how will I get the money?"

"Where?"

"Here."

"Impossible, *señor*."

Strawbridge was getting on edge. He laughed nervously.

"You seem to know more about—er—certain conditions in this country than I do. What would you suggest?"

The black cocked his head a little to one side. "*Seño'*, did you know that the Orinoco River and the Amazon connect with each other up about the Rio Negro?"

"I think I've heard it. Didn't some fellow go through there studying orchids, or something? A fellow was telling me something about that in Trinidad."

"He went through studying everything, *seño'*," said the black man solemnly. "You are thinking of the great savant, Humboldt."

"'M—yes—Humboldt."

Strawbridge repeated the name vaguely, not quite able to place it.

"I would suggest that you follow Herr Humboldt's route, *seño'*. You can carry the bullion down in boats and get it exchanged for drafts in Rio."

A dizzy foreshadowing of Indian canoes laden with treasure pushing through choked tropical waterways shook the drummer. He drew a long breath.

"Is it a practical route? I mean does anybody know the way? Do you think it can be done?"

"I would hardly say practical, *seño'*—it has been done."

The negro and the white man stood looking at each other.

"How do—er—how does any one get to Rio Negro?" asked the drummer nervously.

"You will need some person to pilot you, *seño'*. Some black man would make a good guide."

"Now I just imagine he would," said Strawbridge, drawing in his lips and biting them. "Yes, sir, I imagine he would."

He broke off and suddenly became direct.

"When do we start?"

"When you feel like it, *seño'*. Now if you are ready."

"I stay ready. How do we get there?"

He asked the question with a vague feeling that the black man might climb up to the roof of the blue house and show him a flying-machine.

"I have a little rattle-trap motor around at the garage, *seño'*."

"Uh-huh. Well, that's good; let's go."

The negro went into a room for an old hat, took a key from his pocket, opened the door and courteously bowed the American into the *calle*. When he had locked the door behind them he said, "Now you go in front, *seño'*," and indicated the direction down the street.

Strawbridge did so, the negro following a little distance behind. They looked like master and servant set forth on some trifling errand.

They had not gone very far before Strawbridge observed that two or three blocks behind them came the guitarist. This fellow meandered along with elaborate inattention to either the white man or the negro.

IV

NOW that his rôle of ignoramus and lout had been played, the black man introduced himself as Guillermo Gumersindo and glided into the usual self-explanatory conversation. He was sure Señor Strawbridge would pardon his buffoonery, but one had to be careful when a police visitation was threatened.

He was the editor of a newspaper in Canalejos—*el Correo del Rio Negro*, a newspaper, if he did say it, more ardently devoted to Venezuelan history than any other publication in the republic. Gumersindo had been chosen by General Fombombo to make this purchasing-expedition to Caracas just because he was black and could drop easily into a lowly rôle.

To the ordinary white American an educated negro is an object of curious interest, and Strawbridge strolled along the streets of Caracas with a feeling toward the black editor much the same as one has toward the educated pony which can paw out its name from among the letters of the alphabet.

Gumersindo's historical interest exhibited itself as he and Strawbridge passed through the *mercado*, a plaza given over to hucksters and flower-venders in the heart of Caracas. The black man pointed out a very fine old Spanish house of blue marble with a great coat of arms carved over the door.

"Where Bolivar lived."

Gumersindo made a curving gesture and bowed as if he were introducing the building.

The American looked at the house.

"Bolivar," he repeated vaguely.

The editor opened his eyes slightly.

"*Sí señor;* Bolivar the *Libertador*."

The black man's tone showed Strawbridge that he should have known Bolivar, the *Libertador*.

"Oh, sure," he said easily. "The *Libertador*—I had forgot his business."

The black man looked around at his companion as straight as his politeness admitted.

"*Señor!*" he ejaculated. "I mean the great Bolivar! He has been compared to your Señor George Washington of North America."

Strawbridge turned and stared frankly at the negro.

"Wha-ut?" he drawled, curving up his voice at the absurdity of it and beginning to laugh. "Compared to George Washington, first in war, first in——"

"*Sí, certainmente, señor,*" Gumersindo assured his companion with Venezuelan earnestness.

"But look here!"

Strawbridge laid a hand on his companion's shoulder.

"Do you know what George Washington did, man? He set the whole United States free!"

"But, *hombre!*" cried the editor. "Bolivar! This great, great man—" he pointed to the blue-marble mansion—"he set free the whole continent of South America!"

"He did!"

"*Seguramente!* And this man, who freed a continent, was at length exiled by ungrateful Venezuela and died an outcast, *señor*, in a wretched little town on the Colombian coast, an outcast, without a shirt to his back!"

Strawbridge looked at Bolivar's house with renewed interest.

"Well, I be ——!" he said earnestly. "Freed all of South America— Say, why don't somebody write a book about that?"

Gumersindo pulled in one side of his wide, rolling lips and bit them. The two companions walked on in silence for several blocks west. They passed the Yellow House, the seat of the Venezuelan Government.

On the southern side of this building stands a monument with a big scar on the pedestal where some name has been roughly chiseled out. The negro explained that this monument had been erected by the tyrant Guzman Blanco, who occupied the Venezuelan presidency for eight years; but when Guzman was overthrown by General Crespo the oppressed people in order to show their hatred of the fallen tyrant chiseled out his name on the monument.

Strawbridge stood looking at the scar, and, nodding—

"Did they have to rise against this man Blanco to get him out of office?" he asked in surprize.

"Rise against him!" cried Gumersindo. "Rise against him! Why, *señor*, the only way any Venezuelan President ever did go out of office was by some stronger man rising against him. But come, I will show you on Calvario!"

They moved quickly along the street, which was changing its character somewhat from a business street to a thoroughfare of cheap residences. After going some distance Strawbridge saw the small mountain called Calvario which rises in the western part of the city. The whole eastern face of this mountain had been done into a great flight of ornamental steps. Half-way up was a terrace containing three broken pedestals.

"These," decried Gumersindo," were erected by the infamous Pina; but when Pina was assassinated and the assassin Andrade came into power, the people, infuriated by Pina's long extravagances, tore down the statues he had erected and broke them to pieces."

The black man stood looking with compressed lips at the shattered monoliths in the sunshine.

There was a certain incredulity in Strawbridge's face. The American could not understand such a social state.

"And you say they just keep on that way, one President overthrowing another?"

"Precisely. Wantzelius had Pina assassinated, Toro Torme overthrew Wantzelius, Cancio betrayed and exiled Toro Torme——"

The American arms salesman stood on the stairs of Calvario beneath the broken pedestals and began laughing.

"Well, that's a —— of a way to change Presidents! Shoot 'em—run 'em off—exile 'em! It's just exactly like these greaser Latin countries!"

He sat down on the stairs in the hot sunshine and laughed till the tears rolled out of his eyes.

The thick-set negro stood looking at him with a queer expression.

"It—seems to amuse you, *señor?*"

Strawbridge drew out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. He blew out a long breath.

"It is funny! Just like a movie I saw in New York. It was called "Maid in Mexico" and it showed how these —— greasers battled along in any crazy old way—and here is the wreckage of just some such rough stuff."

He looked up at the broken pedestals again with his face set for mirth, but his jaws ached too badly to laugh any more. He drew a deep breath and became near sober.

Just below him stood the negro like a black shadow on the sunshine. He stared with a solemn face over the city with its sea of red-tiled roofs, its domes and campaniles and the blue peaks of the Andes beyond. Abruptly he turned to Strawbridge.

"Listen, *señor*," he said tensely and held up a finger. "My country has lived in mortal agony ever since Bolivar himself fell from his seat of power amid red rebellion, but there is a man who will remedy Venezuela's age-long wounds; there is a man great enough and generous enough——"

At this point some remnant of mirth caused Strawbridge to compress his lips to keep from laughing again. The dark being on the steps ceased his discourse quite abruptly; then he said with a certain severity:

"Let us understand each other, *señor*. You sell rifles and ammunition, do you not?"

"Yes," said Strawbridge, sobering at once at this hint of business.

Gumersindo took a last glance at the city sleeping in the fulgor of a tropical noon.

"Let's get to the garage," he directed briefly.

V

GUMERSINDO'S automobile turned out to be one of those cheap American machines which one finds everywhere. Its only peculiarity was an extra gasoline tank which filled the greater part of the body of the car and which must have given the old rattletrap a cruising radius of a thousand or fifteen hundred miles.

Just as the negro and the white man were getting into the motor the man with the knot of hair at the back of his head strolled into the garage. He called to the black man that the *Americano* was to take him on the expedition which was just starting.

The black editor looked up and stared.

"Take you!"

"*Sí señor*, me. This *caballero*—" he nodded at Strawbridge—"promised me to take me along for the courtesy of directing him to—well—to a certain address."

Strawbridge heard this with the surprize an American always feels when a Latin street-runner begins manufacturing charges for his service.

"The —— I did! I said nothing about taking you along—I didn't know where I was going. I still don't know."

"*Caramba!*"

The man with the hair spread his hands in amazement.

"Did I not say we would go to the same address, and did not you agree to it!"

"But, you —— fool, you know I meant the address here in Caracas. Good Lord, you know I didn't propose to take you a thousand miles!"

The man with the hair made a strong gesture.

"That's not Felipe, *señor!* That's not Felipe! When a man attaches himself to me in friendly confidence I'm not the man to break with him the moment he has served my purpose. No, I will see you through!"

"But ——, man, I don't want you to see me through!"

"*Ca!* You don't! You go back on your trade!"

The American snapped his fingers and motioned toward the door of the garage.

"Beat it!"

The man with the hair flared up suddenly and began using the most furious Spanish.

"*Diantre! Bien, bien, bien!* I'll establish my trade! I'll call the police and establish my trade! Ray of ——, but I'm an honest man!"

And he started for the door, beginning to peer around for a policeman before he was nearly out.

"Yes, we'll have a police investigation!"

He disappeared.

Strawbridge looked at Gumersindo, and then by a common impulse the black editor and the white drummer started for the door after the man with the hair. The editor hailed him as he was walking rapidly down the *calle*.

"Hold on, my friend. Come back!"

Felipe whirled and started back as rapidly as he had departed. His movements were extraordinarily supple and graceful even in Latin America, where those qualities are common.

"We have decided that we may be able to carry you along after all, Señor Felipe. We may even be of some mutual service. What is your profession?"

"I am, *señor*, a bull-fighter."

He tipped up his handsome head and struck a bull-ring attitude, perhaps unconsciously.

The negro editor stared at him, glanced at Strawbridge and shrugged faintly but hopelessly.

"Very good," he said in a dry tone. "We want you. No expedition would care to set out across the llanos without a bull-fighter or two."

If he hoped by voice and manner to discourage Felipe's attendance he was disappointed. The fellow walked briskly back and was the first man in the motor.

The other two men followed, and as the rattle-trap machine clacked away down the *calle* Felipe continued his occupation as the drummer's cicerone, cheerfully pointing out the sights of Caracas. There was President Lopez' palace; there was an old church built by the Canary Islanders who made a settlement in this part of Caracas long before the colonies revolted against Spain.

"There is La Rotunda, *señor*, where they keep the political prisoners. It is very easy to get in there."

Whether this was mere tourist information or a slight flourish of the whip-hand which Felipe undoubtedly held, Strawbridge did not know.

"Have they got many prisoners?" he asked casually.

"It's full," declared the bull-fighter with gusto. "The overflow goes to Los Castillos, another prison on the Orinoco near Ciudad Bolivar, and also to San Carlos on Lake Maracaibo in the western part of Venezuela."

"What have so many men done that all the prisons are jammed?" asked the drummer, becoming interested.

It was Gumersindo who answered this question, and with passion.

"Señor Strawbridge, those prisons are full of men who are innocent and guilty. Some have attempted to assassinate the President, some to stir up revolutions; some men are merely suspected. A number of men are put in prison merely to force through some business deal advantageous to the Governmental clique.

"I know one editor who has been confined in the dungeons of La Rotunda for ten years. His offense was that he proposed in his paper the name of a man as a candidate for the Presidency."

Strawbridge was shocked.

"Why, that's outrageous! What do the people stand for it for? Why don't they raise —— and stop any such crooked deals? Why, in America do you know how long we would stand for that kind of stuff? Just a minute."

He reached forward and tapped Gumersindo two angry taps on the shoulder.

"Just one minute—that's all."

The bull-fighter laughed gaily.

"Yes, the Rotunda today is full of men who stood that sort of thing for one minute—and then raised ——."

Strawbridge looked around at the bull-fighter.

"But, my dear man, if everybody—everybody—would go in who could stop them?"

Gumersindo made a gesture.

"Señor Strawbridge, there is no everybody in Venezuela. When you say 'everybody' you are speaking as an American, of your American middle class. That is the controlling power in America because it is sufficiently educated and compact to make its majority felt.

"We have no such class in Venezuela. We have an aristocratic class struggling for power and a great peon population too ignorant for any political action whatsoever. The only hope for Venezuela is a beneficent dictator, and you, *señor*, on this journey are about to instate such a man and bring all these atrocities to a close."

A touch of the missionary spirit kindled in Strawbridge at the thought that he might really bring a change in such leprous conditions; but almost immediately his mind turned back to the order he was about to receive, how large it would be, how many rifles, how much ammunition, and he fell into a lovely day-dream as the tropical landscape slipped past him.

AT THIRTY or forty mile intervals the travelers found villages, and at each one they were forced to report their arrival and departure to the police department. Such is the law in Venezuela. It is an effort to keep watch on any considerable movements among the population and so forestall the chronic revolutions that harass the country.

However, the presence of Strawbridge prevented any suspicion on the part of these rural police. Americans travel far and wide over Venezuela as oil-prospectors, rubber-buyers and commercial salesmen. The police never interfere with their activities.

All the villages which the travelers passed were just alike—a main street composed of adobe huts which widened in a central plaza where a few flamboyants and palms grew through holes in a hard pavement. Always at the end of the plaza stood a charming old Spanish church, looking centuries old with its stuccoed front, its solid brick campanile pierced by three apertures in which, silhouetted against the sky, hung the bells.

The church was the focus of life in each village. And the only sign of animation here was the ringing of the carillon for the different offices. These bell-ringings occurred endlessly.

Instead of the tolling such as Strawbridge was accustomed to hear in North America the priests rang their bells with the clangor of a fire alarm. They began softly but swiftly, increased in intensity until the bells roared like the wrath of God over roof and *calle*, and then came to a close with a few slow, solemn strokes.

As is the custom of traveling Americans Strawbridge compared these dirty Latin villages with clean American towns for the benefit of his companions. He pointed out how Americans towns had an underground sewage system instead of allowing their slops to trickle among the cobblestones down the middle of the street; how American towns had water-works and electric lights, wide streets; and if they had a church at all it was certainly not in the public square raising an uproar on week-days. American churches were kept out of the way up back streets, and the business part of town was devoted to business.

Here the negro editor interjected the remark that perhaps each people worshiped its own God.

"Sure we do on Sundays," agreed Strawbridge, "or at least the women do; but on week-days we are out for business."

When the motor left the mountains and entered the semi-arid level of the Orinoco basin, the scenery changed to an endless stretch of sand broken by sparse savanna grass and a scattering of dwarf gray trees such as chaparro, alcornoque, manteco. The only industry here was cattle-raising, and this was uncertain because the cattle died by the thousands for lack of water during the dry season.

Now and then the motor would come in sight or scent of a dead cow, and this led Strawbridge to compare such shiftless cattle-raising with the windmills and irrigation ditches in the American West.

The drummer was on this theme on the fifth day of their drive, and the bull-fighter, who after all was in the car on suffrage, sat nodding his head politely and agreeing with him when Gumersindo interrupted to point ahead over the llano.

"Speaking of irrigation ditches, *señors*, yonder is a Venezuelan canal now."

THE motor was now on one of those long, almost imperceptible slopes which break the level of the llanoes. From this point of vantage the motorists could see an enormous distance over the flat country.

About half-way to the horizon the drummer descried a great, raw, yellow gash cut through the landscape from the south. Strawbridge stared at it in the utmost amazement. Such a cyclopean work in this lethargic country was unbelievable.

On the nearer section of the great gash Strawbridge could make out a movement of what seemed to be little red flecks. The negro editor, who was watching the American's face, gave one of his rare laughs.

"Ah, you are surprized, *señor*."

"Surprized! I'm knocked cold! I didn't know anything this big was being done in Venezuela."

"Well this isn't exactly in Venezuela, *señor*."

"No! How's that?"

"We are now in the free and independent Territory of Rio Negro, *señor*. We are now under the jurisdiction of General Adriano

Fombombo. You observe the difference at once."

By this time the motor was again below the level of the alcornorque growth and the men began talking of what they had seen.

"What's the object of it?" asked Strawbridge.

"The general is going to canalize at least one-half of this entire Orinoco valley. This sandy stretch you see around you, *señor*, will be as fat as the valley of the Nile."

The idea seized on the drummer's American imagination.

"Why, this is amazing; it's splendid! Why haven't I heard of this? Why haven't the American capitalists got wind of this?"

Gumersindo shrugged.

"The Federal authorities are not advertising an insurgent general, *señor*."

After a moment the drummer ejaculated—

"He will be one of the richest men in the world!"

Gumersindo loosed a hand from the steering-wheel a moment to hold it up in protest.

"Don't say that. General Fombombo is an idealist, *señor*. It is his dream to create a supercivilization here in the Orinoco valley. He will be wealthy; the whole nation will be wealthy; yes, enormously wealthy; but what lies beyond wealth? When a people become wealthy what lies beyond that?"

This was evidently a question which the drummer was to answer, so he said—

"Why—they invest that and make still more money."

The editor smiled.

"A very American answer. That is the difference, señor, between the middle-class mind and the aristocratic mind. The *bourgeoisie* can not conceive anything except a mere extension of wealth.

"But wealth is only an instrument. It must be used to some end. Mere brute riches can not avail a man or a people."

The car rattled ahead as Strawbridge considered the editor's implications, that wealth was not the end of existence. It was a mere step, and something lay beyond. Well, what was it outside of a good time?

He thought of some of the famous fortunes in America. Some of their owners made art collections, some gave to charity, some bought divorces.

But even to the drummer's casual thinking, there became apparent the rather trivial uses of these fortunes compared to the fundamental exertion it required to obtain them. Even to Strawbridge it became clear that the use was a step down from the earning.

"What's Fombombo going to do with his?" he asked out of his reverie.

"His what?"

"Fortune—when he makes it?"

"*Pues*, he will found a Government where men can forget material care and devote their lives to the arts, the sciences and pure philosophy. Great cities will gem these llanos in which poverty is banished, and they will form a brotherhood of intellectuals, a mental aristocracy, based not on force, but kindliness and good will."

"I see-ee," dragged out the drummer. "That's when everybody gets enough wealth——"

"—and devotes himself to altruistic ends," finished the editor.

The drummer was trying to imagine such a system when Gumersindo clamped on the brakes and brought the car to a sudden standstill. Strawbridge looked up and saw a stocky soldier in the middle of the road with a carbine leveled at the travelers.

Strawbridge gasped and sat upright. The soldier in the sunshine with his carbine making a little circle under his right eye focused the drummer's attention so rigidly that for several moments he could not see anything else.

Then he became aware that they had come out upon the canal construction, and that a most extraordinary army of shocking red figures were trailing up and down the sides of the big cut in the sand like an army of ants. Every worker bore a basket on his head, and his legs were chained together so he could take only a step of medium length.

The guard was a smiling, well-kept soldier and he began an apology for having stopped the car. He had been taking his *siesta*, he said; the popping of the car had awakened him, and he thought some one was trying to rescue some of the workers. He had been half-asleep and was very sorry.

The cadaverous, unshaven faces of the hobbled men, their ragged red clothes, gave Strawbridge a nightmarish impression. They might have been fantasmas produced by the heat of the sun.

"What have these fellows done?" asked

the American, looking at them in amazement.

The guard paused in his conversation with Gumersindo to look at the American. He shrugged.

"How do I know, *señor?* I am the guard, not the judge."

Out of the rim of the ditch crept one of the creatures, with scabs about his legs where the chains worked. He advanced toward the automobile.

"*Señores,*" he said in a ghastly whisper, "a little bread, a little piece of meat."

The guard turned and was about to drive the wretch back into the ditch when Strawbridge cried out: "Don't! Let him alone!" and began groping hurriedly under his seat for a box where they carried their provisions. When the other prisoners learned that the motorists were about to give away food a score of living cadavers came dragging their chains out of the pit, holding out hands that were claws and babbling in all keys, flattened, hoarsened, edged by starvation:

"A little here, *señor!*"

"A bit for Christ's sake, *señor!*"

"Give me a bit of bread and take a dying man's blessing, *señor!*"

They stank; their red rags crawled. Such odors, such lazar faces, tickled Strawbridge's throat with nausea. Saliva pooled under his tongue. He spat, gripped his nerves and asked one of the creatures—

"*Señor*, for God's sake what brought you here?"

The prisoners were mumbling their "*gracias*" for each bit of food. One poor devil even refrained from chewing a moment to answer—

"*Señor*, I had a cow, and the *jefe civil* took my cow and sent me to the 'reds.' "

"*Señor*," shivered another voice, "I—I fished in the Orinoco. I was never very fortunate. When the *jefe civil* was forced to make up his tally to the reds he chose me—I was never very fortunate."

An old man whose face was all eyes and long gray hair had got around on the side of the car opposite to the guard. He leaned toward Strawbridge, wafting a revolting odor.

"*Señor*," he whispered, "I had a pretty daughter. I meant to give her to a strong lad called Esteban for a wife, but the *jefe civil* suddenly broke up my home and sent me to the reds—she was a pretty girl, my little Madruja. *Señor*, can it be by chance that you are traveling toward Canalejos?"

The American nodded slightly into the sunken eyes.

"Then for our Lady's sake, *señor*, if she is not already lost, be kind to my little Madruja. Give her a word from me, *señor*. Tell her—tell her—" he looked about him with his ghastly hollow eyes—"tell her that her old father is—well and kindly treated on—on account of his age."

Just then the bull-fighter leaned past the American.

"You say this girl, this young wife, is in Canalejos, *señor?*"

"*Sí, señor.*"

"Then the holy Virgin has directed you to the right person, *señor*. I am Felipe, the bull-fighter, a man of heart."

He touched his athletic chest.

"I will find your little Madruja, *señor*, and care for her as if she were my own."

The convict reached out a shaking claw.

"*Gracias a Madre in cielo! Gracias San Pedro! Gracias la Virgen Imaculata!*"

Somehow a tear had managed to form in the wretch's dried and sunken eye.

"You give her to me, *señor?*"

"*Oh, sí, sí! Un million gracias!*"

"You hear that, Señor Strawbridge? The poor little bride Madruja in Canalejos is now under my protection."

The drummer felt a qualm, but said nothing because after all nothing was likely to come from so shadowy a trust. The red-garbed skeleton tried to give more thanks.

"Come, come, don't oppress me with your gratitude, *viejo*. It is nothing for me. I am all heart. Step away from in front of the car so we may start at once. *Vamose, señores!* Let us fly to Canalejos!"

GUMERSINDO let in his clutch, there was a shriek of cogs, and the motor plowed through the sand. The bull-fighter turned and waved good-by to the guards and smiled gaily at the ancient prisoner. The motor crossed the head of the dry canal, and the party looked down into its cavernous depth.

As the great work dropped in the distance behind the party, the dull red convicts and their awful faces followed Strawbridge with the persistence of a bad dream. At last he broke out—

"Gumersindo, is it possible that those men back there had committed no crime?"

The negro looked around at him.

"Some had, and some had not, *señor*."

"Was the fisherman innocent? Was the old man with the daughter innocent?"

"It is like this, Señor Strawbridge," said Gumersindo, watching his course ahead. "The *jefes civils* of the different districts must make up their quota of men to work on the canal. They select all the idlers and bad characters they can, but they need more. Then they select for different reasons. All the *jefes civils* are not angels. Sometimes they send a man to the reds because they want his cow or his wife or his daughter."

"Is this the beginning of Fombombo's brotherhood devoted to altruistic ends?" cried Strawbridge.

"*Mi caro amigo*," argued the editor with the amiability of a man explaining a well-thought-out premise, "why not? There must be a beginning made. The peons will not work except under compulsion. Shall the whole progress of Rio Negro be stopped while some one tries to persuade a stupid peon population the advisability of laboring? They would never be persuaded."

"But that is such an outrageous thing, to take an innocent man from his work, take a father from his daughter!"

The editor made a suave gesture.

"Certainly. That is simply applying a military measure to civil life—drafted labor. The sacrifice of a part for the whole.

"That has always been the Spanish idea, *señor*. The first *conquistadores* drafted labor among the Indians. The Spanish Inquisition drafted saints from a world of sinners. If one is striving for an ultimate good, *señor*, one can not haggle about the price."

"But that isn't doing those fellows right!" cried Strawbridge, pointing vehemently toward the canal they had left behind. "It isn't doing those particular individuals right!"

"A great many Americans did not want to join the Army during the war. Was it right to draft them?"

He paused a moment and then added:

"No, Señor Strawbridge, back of every aristocracy stands a group of workers represented by the reds. It is the price of leisure for the superior man, and without leisure there is no superiority.

"Where one man thinks and feels and flowers into genius, Señor Strawbridge, ten must slave. Weeds must die that fruit may grow. And that is the whole content of humanity, Señor Strawbridge, its fruit.

"That is why a genuine republic would maintain such a dead level of intellect, Señor Strawbridge; every republican would think a little, every republican would work a little, every republican would hold a commonplace goal of a little better home and a little bigger bank-account. That is the philosophy of a man who has had to work to keep his home and his bank-account. He has never been allowed to forget them."

The first part of this monolog Strawbridge followed without interest, the last not at all. Some two hours later the negro pointed out a distant town purfling the horizon. It was Canalejos.

Strawbridge rode forward, looking at General Fombombo's capital city. The houses were built so closely together that they resembled a walled town. As the buildings were constructed of sun-dried brick the metropolis was a warm yellow in common with the savannas. It looked as if the city were a part of the soil, as if the winds and sunshine somehow had fashioned these architectural shapes as they had the mesas of New Mexico and Arizona.

The whole scene was suffused with the saffron light of deep afternoon. It reminded the drummer of a play he had seen just before leaving New York. He could not recall the name of the play, but it opened with a desert scene and a beggar sitting in front of a temple. It was just such a solemn, yellow sunset as this.

As the drummer thought of these things the motor had drawn close enough to Canalejos to make out some of the details of the picture. Now the drummer could see a procession of people moving along the yellow walls of the city.

Presently above the putter of the automobile he heard snatches of a melancholy singing. The bull-fighter leaned forward in his seat and watched and listened. Presently he said with a certain note of concern in his voice—

"Gumersindo, that's a wedding!"

"I believe it is," agreed the editor.

Felipe hesitated, then:

"Would you mind putting on a little more speed, *señor?* It—it would be interesting to find out whose wedding it is."

The negro fed more gasoline without comment. As the motor whirled cityward the bull-fighter sat with both hands gripping the front seat, staring intently as the wedding music of the peons came to them with its long-drawn, melancholy burden.

Strawbridge leaned back, listening and looking. He was still thinking about the play in New York and regretting the fact that in real life one never saw any such dramatic openings. In real life it was always just work, work, work, going after an order or collecting a bill; never any drama or romance; just dull, prosy, commonplace business—like this.

VI

CANALEJOS was no exception to the general rule that all Venezuelan cities function upon a war basis. At the entrance of a *calle*, just outside the city wall, stood a faded green sentry-box.

As the motor drove up a sentry popped out of the box with a briskness and precision unusual in Venezuela. He stood chin up, heels together, quite as if he were under some German martinet. With a snap he handed the motorists the police register and jerked out from somewhere down in his thorax, military fashion:

"Hup! Your names—point of departure—destination—profession——"

It amused Strawbridge to see a South American performing such military antics. It was like a child playing soldier. He was moved to mimic the little fellow by grunting back in the same tones:

"Hup! Strawbridge—Caracas—Canalejos—sell guns and ammunition——"

Then he wrote those answers in the book.

An anxious look flitted across the face of the sentry at this jocularity. His stiff "eyes front" flickered an instant toward the sentry-box.

While the negro and the bull-fighter were filling in the register a peon came riding up on a black horse. He stopped just behind the motor and awaited his turn with the immense patience of his kind.

While his two companions were signing, Strawbridge yielded to that impulse for horseplay which so often attacks Americans who are young and full-blooded. He leaned out of the motor very solemnly, lifted the cap of the sentry, turned the visor behind and replaced it on his head. The effect was faintly but undeniably comic. The little soldier's face went beet-colored.

At the same moment came a movement inside the sentry-box, and out of the door stepped a somewhat fleshy man with the epaulets, gold braid and stars of a general on his uniform. He was the most dignified man and had the most penetrating eyes that Strawbridge ever saw in his life. He had that peculiar possessive air about him which Strawbridge had felt when once at a New York banquet he saw J. P. Morgan. By merely stepping out of the sentry-box this man seemed to appropriate the *calle*, the motor and men and the llanos beyond the town.

Strawbridge instantly knew that he was in the presence of General Adriano Fombombo, and the *gaucherie* of having turned around the little sentry's cap set up a sharp sinking feeling in the drummer's chest. For this one stupid bit of foolery he might very well pay his whole order for munitions.

The negro Gumersindo leaped out of the car and removed his hat with a deep bow.

"Your Excellency, I am delighted to see you again. I have the pleasure to report that I accomplished your mission without difficulty, that I have procured an American gentleman whom, if you will allow me the privilege, I will present. General Fombombo, this is Señor Tomas Strawbridge of New York City."

By this time Strawbridge had scrambled out of the motor and extended his hand.

The general, although he was not as tall as the drummer nor really as large, drew Strawbridge to him somehow as if he had been a small boy.

"I see your long journey from Caracas has not entirely fatigued you," he said with a faint gleam of amusement in his eyes.

Strawbridge felt a deep relief. He glanced at the soldier's cap and began to laugh.

"Thank you, I manage to travel very well."

The general turned to the negro.

"Gumersindo, telephone my *casa* that Señor Strawbridge will occupy the chamber overlooking the river."

The drummer put up his hand in protest. "Now, general, I'll go on to the hotel."

The general erased the objection.

"There are no hotels in Canalejos, Señor Strawbridge—a few little eating-houses which the peons use when they come in from the llanos; that is all."

By this time Strawbridge's embarrassment had vanished, and his drummeresque ebulliency was flowing back to him. The general somehow magnified him, set him up on a plane the salesman had never occupied before.

"Well, general," he began cheerfully, using the American formula, "how is business here in Canalejos?"

"Business," repeated the soldier suavely. "Let me see—business. You refer, I presume, to commercial products?"

"Why, yes," agreed the drummer, rather surprized.

"*Pues*, the peons, I believe, are gathering balata. The cocoa *estancias* will be sending in their yield at the end of this month; tonka beans——"

"Are prices holding up well?" interrupted Strawbridge with the affable discourtesy of an American who never quite waits till his question is answered.

"I believe so, Señor Strawbridge, or rather I assume so. I have not seen a market quotation in —" He turned to the editor.

"Señor Gumersindo, you are a journalist. Are you *au courant* with the market reports?"

The negro made a slight bow.

"On what commodity, your Excellency?"

"What commodity are you particularly interested in, Señor Strawbridge?" inquired the soldier.

"Why—er—just the general trend of the market," said Strawbridge with a feeling that his little excursion into that peculiar mechanical talk of business, markets, prices, which was so dear to his heart, had not come off very well.

"There has been, I believe, an advance in some prices and a decline in others," generalized Gumersindo; "the usual seasonal fluctuations."

"*Sí gracias*," acknowledged the general. "Señor Gumersindo, during Señor Strawbridge's residence in Canalejos you will kindly furnish him the daily market quotations."

"*Sí, señor.*"

The matter of business was settled and disposed of. Came that slight hiatus in which hosts await for a guest to decide what shall be the next topic. The drummer thought rapidly over his repertoire; he thought of baseball; Ty Cobb's race in the batting column; one or two smoker jokes popped into his head but were discarded; he considered discussing the probable Republican majority Ohio would show in the next Presidential election. Strawbridge had a little book at that moment in his vest pocket which gave the vote by States for the past decade.

In Pullman smoking-cars the drummer had found this little book to be an arsenal of debate. He could make terrific political forecasts and prove them by this little book. But with his very fingers on his book, he decided against talking Ohio politics to an insurgent general in Rio Negro.

His thoughts boggled at business again, at the prices of things, when he glanced about and saw Felipe, who had been entirely neglected during this colloquy. The drummer at once seized on his companion to bridge the hiatus. He drew the *espada* to him with a gesture.

"General Fombombo," he introduced with a salesman's ebullience, "meet Señor Felipe. Señor Felipe is a bull-fighter, general, and they tell me he pulls a nasty sword."

The general nodded pleasantly at the *torero*.

"I am very glad you have come to Canalejos, Señor Felipe. I think I shall order in some bulls and have an exhibition of your art. If you care to look at our bull-ring in Canalejos you will find it in the eastern part of our city."

He pointed in the direction and apparently brushed the bull-fighter away, for Felipe bowed with the muscular suppleness of his calling and took himself off in the direction indicated.

At that moment the general observed the peon on the black horse, who as yet had not dared to present himself at the sentry-box before the *caballeros*.

"What are you doing on that horse, *bribon?*" asked the general.

"I was waiting to enter, your Excellency," explained the fellow hurriedly.

"Your name?"

"Guillermo Fando, your Excellency."

"Is that your horse?"

"*Sí*, your Excellency."

"Take it to my cavalry barracks and deliver it to Coronel Saturnino. A donkey will serve your purpose."

Fando's mouth dropped open. He stared at the President.

"T-Take my *caballo* to the — the cavalry——"

A little flicker came into the black eyes of the dictator. He said in a somewhat lower tone:

"Is it possible, Fando, that you do not understand Spanish? Perhaps a little season in La Fortuna——"

The peon's face went mud-colored.

"*P-Perdon, su excellencia!*" he stuttered, and the next moment thrust his heels into the black's side and went clattering up the narrow *calle*, filling the drowsy afternoon with the clamor.

The general watched him disappear and then turned to Strawbridge.

"*Caramba*, the devil himself must be getting into these peons—speaking to me after I had instructed him——"

The completely proprietary air of the general camouflaged the taking of the horse from the peon under a semblance of military discipline. It was only after the three men were in Gumersindo's car and on their way to the President's palace that the implications of the incident developed in the drummer's mind. The peon was not in the Army; the horse belonged to the peon; and yet Fombombo had taken it with a mere glance and word.

EVENING was gathering now. The motor rolled through a street of dark little shops. Here and there a candle-flame pricked a black interior. Above the level line of roofs the east gushed with a wide orange light.

The dictator and the editor had respected the musing mood of their guest and were now talking to each other in low tones. They were discussing Pio Baroja's novels.

Once in the course of their trip the drummer had that characteristic American feeling that he was wasting time, that here in the car he might get some idea of the general's needs in the way of guns and ammunition. In a pause of the talk about Baroja he made an attempt to speak of the business which had brought him to Canalejos, but the general smoothed this wrinkle out of the conversation, and the talk veered around to Zamacois.

The drummer dropped back into his original thoughts about the injustice and inequalities of life here in Rio Negro and what the American people would do under such circumstances when the motor turned into Plaza Mayor, and the motorists saw a procession of torches marching beneath the trees on the other side of the square. Then the drummer observed that the automobile in which he rode and the moving line of torches were converging on the dark front of a massive building.

He watched the flames without interest until his own conveyance and the marchers came to a halt in front of the great spread of ornamental stairs that flowed out of the entrance of the palace. A priest in a cassock stood at the head of the procession, and immediately behind him were two peons—a young man and a girl, both in wedding finery. They evidently had come for the legal ceremony which must follow the religious ceremony in Venezuela, for as the car stopped a number of voices became audible:

"There is his Excellency!"

"In the motor, not in the *palacio!*"

The priest lifted his voice.

"Your Excellency, here are a man and a woman who desire——"

While the priest was talking a graceful figure ran lightly up the ornamental steps and stood out strongly against the white marble.

"Your Excellency," he called, "I must object to this wedding! I require time. I represent the father of the bride. It is my paternal duty, your Excellency, to investigate this suitor——"

Every one in the line stared at the figure on the steps. The priest began in an astonished voice—

"How is this, my son——"

"I represent the father of this girl," asserted the man on the steps warmly. "I must look into the character of this bridegroom—a father, your Excellency, is a tender relation."

A sudden outbreak came from the party:

"Who is this man?"

"What did he mean by father? Madruja's father is with the reds."

General Fombombo, who had been watching this little scene passively from the motor, now scrutinzed the girl herself. It drew Strawbridge's attention to her. She was a tall pantheress of a girl, and the wavering torchlight at one moment displayed and the next concealed her rather wild black eyes, full lips and a certain untamed beauty of face. Her husband elect was a hard, weather-worn youth. The coupling of two such creatures together did seem rather incongruous.

General Fombombo asked a few questions as he stepped out of the car:

Who was she? What claim had the man on the steps?

He received a chorus of answers, none of which were intelligible. All the while he kept scrutinizing the girl, appraising the contours visible through the bridal veil. At last he waggled a finger and said:

"*Ca! Ca!* I will decide this later. The *señorita* may occupy the north room of the palace tonight, and later I will go into this matter more carefully. I have guests now."

He clapped his hands.

"Ho, guards!" he called. "Conduct *la señorita* to the north room for the night."

Two soldiers in uniform came running down the steps. The line of marchers shrank from the armed men. The girl stared large-eyed at this swift turn in her affairs. Suddenly she clutched her betrothed's arm.

"Esteban!" she cried. "Esteban!"

The groom stood staring, apparently unable to move as the soldiers hurried down the steps.

By this time General Fombombo was escorting the drummer courteously up the stairs into the deply recessed entrance of the palace. Strawbridge could not resist looking back to see the outcome of this singular wedding. But now the torchbearers were scattering, and all the drummer could see was a confused movement in the gloom, and now and then he heard the sharp, broken shrieks of a woman.

His observations were cut short by General Fombombo making a deep bow at the top of the stairs.

"My house and all that it contains are yours, *señor*."

Strawbridge bowed as he uttered to this stereotype the formal response—

"And yours also."

VII

AS THE general led the way into the *palacio* through a broad entrance hall the cry of the peon girl still clung to the fringe of Thomas Strawbridge's mind. He put it resolutely aside and assumed his professional business attitude. That is to say, a manner of complimentary intimacy such as an American drummer always assumes toward a prospective buyer.

He laid a warm hand on the general's arm and indicated some large oil paintings hung along the hallway. He complimented them and said they were "nifty." He suggested that the general was pretty well fixed. He asked how long he had lived here in the State house.

"Ever since I seized control of the Government in Rio Negro," answered the dictator simply.

For some reason the reply disconcerted Strawbridge. He had not expected such a bald statement. At that moment came the ripple of a piano from one of the rooms off the hallway. The notes rose and fell, massed by some skilful performer into a continuous tone. Strawbridge listened to it and complimented it.

"Pretty music," he said.

"That is my wife playing—la Señora Fombombo."

"*Is* it?"

The drummer's accent congratulated the general on having a wife who could play so well. He tilted his head so the general could see that he was listening and admiring.

"Do you like that sort of music, general?" he asked breezily.

"What sort?"

"That your wife's playing. It's classic music isn't it?"

The general was really at loss. He also began listening trying to determine whether the music was of the formal classic school of Bach and Handel, or whether it belonged to the later romantics or the modern. He was unaware that Americans of Strawbridge's type divided all music into two kinds, classic and jazz, and that anything which they do not like falls into the category of classic, and anything they do is jazz.

"I really can't discriminate," admitted the general.

"You bet I can," declared Strawbridge briskly. "That's classic. It hasn't got the jump to it, general—the rumpty-dumpty-boom. I can feel the lack, you know, the something that's missing. I play a little myself."

The general murmured an acknowledgment of the salesman's virtuosity, and almost at the same moment sounds from the piano ceased. A little later the door of the salon opened, and into the hall stepped a slight figure dressed in the bonnet and black robe of a nun.

For such a woman to come out of the music-room gave the drummer a faint surprize. Then he reflected that this was one of the sisters from some near-by convent who had come to give piano lessons to Señora Fombombo. This idea was immediately upset by the general saying, "Dolores," and as the nun turned, "Señora Fombombo, allow me to present my friend Señor Strawbridge."

The queerness of being presented to a nun who was also the general's wife disconcerted Strawbridge. The girl in the robe was bowing and placing their home at Mr. Strawbridge's disposal. The drummer was saying vague things in response:

"Very grateful— The general had insisted— He hoped that she would feel better soon——"

Where under Heaven Strawbridge had fished up this last sentiment he did not know. His face flushed red at such a foolish remark.

Señora Fombombo smiled briefly and kindly and went her way down the passage, a somber, religious figure. Presently she opened one of the dull mahogany doors and disappeared.

The general stood looking after his wife thoughtfully and then answered the question which he knew would be in his guest's mind.

"Dolores wears that costume on account of a vow," he explained. "Her sister was sick in Madrid, and she vowed to the Virgin if she were restored she would wear a Carmelite habit."

"And she's doing it?" ejaculated Strawbridge in an amazed voice.

The general made a gesture.

"Her sister was restored."

The American began impulsively:

"Well, I must say that's rather rough on— Why, her vow had nothing to do with— You know her sister would have——"

It seemed that none of the sentences which the American began could be concluded with courtesy. Finally he was left suspended in air with a slight perspiration on his face. He drew out a silk handkerchief, dabbed his face and wiped his wrists.

"General—" he floundered on to solider ground—"now about how many rifles are you going to want?"

The dictator looked at him, almost as much at loss as the drummer had been.

"Rifles?"

"Yes," proceeded the drummer, becoming quite his enthusiastic self again at this veering back to business. "You see, it will depend upon what you are going to do with 'em, how many you will need. If you are just going to hold this State which you have—er—seized, why you won't need so many; but if you are going out and try to grab some more towns you'll need a lot more."

The dictator considered his guest with a penetrating scrutiny.

"Why do you ask such a question, Señor Strawbridge?" he inquired in a changed tone.

"Because it's your business."

"My business!"

"Why, yes," declared Strawbridge amiably and with gathering aplomb. "You see, general, when my firm sends out a salesman the very first rule they teach him is, 'Study your customer's business.'

" 'Study his business,' said my boss, 'just the same as if it was your own business. Don't oversell him; don't undersell him. Sell him just exactly what he needs. You want your customer to rely on you,' says my old man, 'so you must be reliable. When you sell a man, you have really gone into partnership with him. His gain is your gain——' "

By this time Strawbridge was accenting his points by thumping earnestly on the dictator's shoulder.

"A hundred times I have heard my old man say to me, 'Strawbridge, if you don't make your customer's business your own; if his problems are not your problems; if you can't lend him expert advice on his difficulties, then you are no salesman; you are simply a mutt with a sample-case.' "

This eruption of American business philosophy came from Strawbridge as naturally and bubblingly as champagne released from a bottle. He had at last got his prospect's ear and had launched his sales talk. The general listened to this outburst with rather a blank face.

"So you were inquiring through considerations of business?"

"Exactly. I want to know your probable market. Perhaps I can think up a way to extend it."

"I see."

The general was beginning to smile faintly now.

"Because I am going to buy some rifles from you, you ask me what cities I am going to attack next."

A slight disconcert played through Strawbridge at this bald statement, but he went through with it determinedly.

"That's the idea. If you are going to use my guns I'm partners with you in your—er—expansion. That's American methods, general—that's straightforward and honest."

General Fombombo drew in his lips, bit them thoughtfully and considered Strawbridge. No man with even a rudimentary knowledge of human nature could have doubted the drummer's complete sincerity. The general seemed to be repressing some inward smile.

"Suppose we step here in my study a moment, Señor Strawbridge. We might discuss my—my business, as you put it, if you will excuse its prematurity."

"That's what I'm here for—business," said Strawbridge earnestly as he entered a door which the dictator opened.

A WALL-MAP was the most conspicuous feature of General Fombombo's library—a huge wall-map of Venezuela which covered the entire western wall of the room. As the two men entered only the lower third of this cartograph was revealed by reading-lamps ranged along tables; but the general switched on a frieze of ceiling lights, and this swept the whole projection into high illumination.

The general stood looking at it meditatively, drew out and glanced at his watch as if timing some other engagement, then pointed out to Strawbridge that the greater part of the chart was outlined in blue, while the extreme western end of the Orinoco valley was in red.

"That is my life's work, Señor Strawbridge—extending this red outline of the free and independent State of Rio Negro to include the whole Orinoco valley. I want to consolidate an empire from the Andes to the Atlantic."

Strawbridge stood nodding, looking at the blue and red map, and began his characteristic probing for detail.

"How many square miles you got now, general?"

To Strawbridge's surprize, the dictator repeated this question in a somewhat louder tone.

"How many square miles does the State of Rio Negro now contain, Coronel Saturnino?"

And a voice from the northern end of the study answered—

"Seventeen thousand five hundred and eighty-two, general."

The general repeated these figures to Strawbridge.

At the first words uttered by the voice Strawbridge turned to see a third person in the library, a young man behind a reading-lamp at the other end of the room busy at some clerical work. Strawbridge turned his thoughts back to the figures and fixed them in his mind, then set out after more details.

"How much more is there to be consolidated?"

This question in turn was relayed to the clerk, who said—

"Two hundred and thirty-two thousand, four hundred and eighteen."

The American compared the two figures and looked at the map.

"Then it will take you a long time—a number of years to finish."

"Oh, no," objected the general, becoming absorbed in his subject. "Our progress will be in geometrical, not in arithmetical ratio. You see every new town we absorb gives us so much human material for our next step."

"I see that," assented the drummer, looking at the map. "And your idea is to absorb the whole Orinoco valley?"

The general's answer to this was informed with genuine ardor. The Orinoco valley was one of the largest geographical units in the world, a great natural empire. It was variously estimated at from two hundred and fifty thousand to six hundred and fifty thousand square miles in area. It was drained by four hundred and thirty-six rivers and upward of two thousand streams.

These innumerable waters would convert the whole region into a seaport. With such cheap transportation the Orinoco country could supply the world with cocoa, tonka beans, cotton, sugar, rubber, tropical cabinet woods, cattle, hides, gold, diamonds.

"But what I have just traveled over is almost a desert," objected Strawbridge. "The cattle were dying of thirst."

"*Precismente!*" interjected the general with a sharp gesture. "But right at this moment I am driving a canal from here to here."

He took a long ruler and began to point eagerly on the map.

"Yes, I saw your—your men at work."

The drummer stuttered as the ghastly reds recurred to his mind.

"That canal will furnish water in the dry season. In the wet season it will form a conduit to impound the waters in this great natural depression here."

The dictator pointed dynamically at the configuration shown on the map.

"Young man, can you imagine such a development? Can you fancy the Nile valley magnified thirty times?"

He waved at the brilliantly lighted map.

"Can you imagine league after league lush with harvest, decked with noble cities and peopled by the aristocrats of the earth? I refer to the Spanish race.

"You must realize, *señor*, there have been but two dominant races in modern history—the English and the Spanish. We two divided the New World between us.

"You will agree with me when I say that the English North Americans have cultivated the material side of civilization to a degree that has never been approached in the sweep of human history. It is unreasonable to suppose that the other great segment of humanity, the Spanish South Americans, will cultivate the immaterial side, will establish a great artistic, intellectual and spiritual hegemony in the world?

"By such a division our imperial races will supplement each other. One will show the world how to produce, the other how to live. We will be the halves of a whole."

Strawbridge followed this dithyramb keenly in regard to the irrigation and development project; the artistic end sounded rather nebulous to him.

"And you've got this far with it," he praised, pointing at the red boundary. "What's the next step?"

The dictator was riding his own hobby now, and he answered without reservation—

"This town—San Geronimo."

"When are you going to do it?"

"We will absorb San Geronimo— Let me see— Coronel Saturnino, on what date do we attack San Geronimo?"

"On the twenty-third of this month," came the voice from the back of the study.

"Exactly. We want to incorporate that town with the State of Rio Negro before our flotilla returns up the Amazon from Rio Janeiro."

"When do you expect them back?"

"Inside of two months."

"Let me see; are they the boats Gumersindo was talking about? He spoke of my going up the Orinoco, crossing to the Amazon and then going down to Rio Janeiro."

"Those were the instructions I gave Señor Gumersindo."

Strawbridge stood looking up at the map. A sudden plan popped into his head.

"Since I'll be here, it would not be a bad plan for me to run along with your army to San Geronimo and see how the trick of absorbing it is done. Give me some notion of the working end of this business."

The dictator looked at the salesman.

"Do you mean you desire to accompany my army to San Geronimo?"

"Wouldn't be a bad idea."

"You would be accepting a certain risk, *señor*."

"It is dangerous?"

The salesman was surprized. The general had talked so comfortably about "absorbing" San Geronimo that it sounded like a very peaceable operation.

"Anyway," he persisted with a certain characteristic stubborness, "this will be a good opportunity to learn about actual conditions down here, and if you can make a place for me I believe I'll go."

The dictator became grave.

"It is my duty to advise you against it."

Strawbridge considered his host.

"Your objections are not to me personally, are they, señor?" he asked frankly.

"No, not at all. My resources are entirely at your disposal."

"Then I think I ought to go," decided the American. "You see, when my old man started me out, he said to me: 'Study conditions first hand, Strawbridge. Find out what your customer has to meet. Make his problems your problems, his interest your interest.' So you see I am very glad of the chance to see just how this absorption business works."

All this was given in a very enthusiastic tone. The dictator smiled faintly.

"You are personally welcome to go. You can speak to Coronel Saturnino. He will arrange your billet."

"Good! Good!"

Strawbridge was gratified. Then he dropped automatically into the follow-up methods taught him by the sales manager of the Union Arms and Metallic Company.

"And now, general," he continued intimately, "about how many rifles do we want shipped here?"

As he asked this question he used his left hand to draw a leather-covered book from his hip pocket, while with his right he plucked a fountain pen from his vest pocket. With a practised flirt he flung open his order-book at a rubber-band marker. Thus mobilized, he looked with bright expectation at his prospect.

The general seemed a little at loss.

"Do you mean how many rifles *I* want?"

Strawbridge nodded and repeated in an intimate, confident tone—

"Yes; how many do we want?" the pronoun following up the impression of how thoroughly he had identified himself with the interest of his customer.

Fombombo hesitated a moment, then asked aloud—

"*Coronel*, how many rifles do we want?"

The young *coronel* did not pause in his work.

"Twenty-five thousand, general."

His brain seemed to be a card index.

"Twenty-five thousand," repeated Fombombo.

A jubilant sensation went through the drummer at the hugeness of the order. He jotted something in his book.

"When do you want them delivered?"

"As soon as I can get them."

Strawbridge made soft blurry noises of approval, nodding as he wrote.

"And how shipped?"

All through this little colloquy the general seemed rather at sea. At last he said—

"We can arrange these details later, Señor Strawbridge."

THE drummer suddenly turned his full-power selling talk on his prospect. This was the pinch, this was where he either "put it across" or failed. For just this crisis his sales manager had drilled him day after day. He turned on the dictator and began in an earnest, almost a religious tone:

"Now, general, I can make you satisfactory terms and prices—every article that leaves our shop is guaranteed—the Union Arms brands are today the standards by which all other firearms are judged. You can't make a mistake by ordering now——"

He pushed the pen and the book closer to the general's hands. All the President had to do now was simply to close his fingers.

"*Señor*, we can hardly go into such details tonight."

The dictator moved back a trifle from the drummer with a South American's distaste of touching another human being of the same sex.

"There is no necessity. You will be here for weeks, waiting for my canoes from Rio. They will bring drafts, some gold, some barter. When all this is arranged I will send you down the Amazon to embark at Rio for New York, but we have a long wait coming until my flotilla arrives."

The salesman made a flank attack almost without thinking.

He gently insinuated the book and pen into the general's fingers.

"Now, your Excellency," he murmured raising his brows, "you sign the dotted line; just here, see?"

He pointed at it absorbedly.

"I want you to do it to protect yourself. If the prices happen to advance you get the benefit of today's quotations—see? If they fall, why countermand and order again—see? I'm trying to protect your interest just the same as if it was mine, general."

The dictator returned pen and book.

"We will discuss these details later, *señor*."

He drew out his watch and seemed struck by the hour.

"I am sure you are weary after your long ride, Señor Strawbridge. I myself unfortunately have another engagement. Allow me to introduce you to Coronel Saturnino."

He moved with the salesman toward the man at the desk, a moment later presented the *coronel* and bowed himself away.

The drummer was discomfited at his prospect's escape; nevertheless he shook hands warmly with Coronel Saturnino. The *coronel* was a handsome young officer in uniform, and his sword leaned against the desk at which he sat writing.

Saturnino's face tended toward squareness. He had a low forehead, broad and faintly knobby. His thick black hair was glossy with youth. His square-cut face was marked with a faintly superior smile as if he perceived all the weaknesses of the person who was before him and they amused him slightly.

He was of middle height. Strawbridge would have called him heavy-set except for a remarkably slender waist. When the *coronel* stood up and shook hands with the drummer, Strawbridge discovered that he was in the presence of an athlete.

The salesman put himself on a friendly footing with this subaltern at once, just as he always did with the clerks in American stores. He gave his buttock a hitch over the edge of Coronel Saturnino's desk and made himself at ease.

"Well, I thought I was going to land the old general right off the bat," he confided, laughing.

"Yes?" inquired Saturnino politely, still standing. "Why your haste?"

"Oh, well—" Strawbridge wagged his head—"push your business or your business will push you. Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today. Why, there might be a German salesman in here tomorrow with another line of goods."

"Is there a German salesman coming?" asked the *coronel* quickly.

"Oh, no, no, no; I said there might be."

Strawbridge reached in an inner pocket, drew out and flipped open a silver case.

"Have a cigar."

"No, thank you."

The *coronel* hesitated and added—

"I don't smoke after twelve o'clock at night."

Strawbridge jumped up.

"Good Lord! Is it as late as that?' '

The *coronel* thought it was.

"By the way," interrupted the drummer. "I'm to go with you to San Geronimo. The old man said so. I'll get the hang of things down there—I suppose it pays, this revolting, or the old man wouldn't stay in the business."

As the *coronel* simply stood, Strawbridge continued his desultory remarks:

"The old man's got a grand scheme, hasn't he, canalizing the Orinoco valley? Say, this goes: When you fellows put that across, this beautiful little city of Canalejos will just have a shade on any —— burg in this wide world. Now you can take that flat—it goes."

He made a gesture with his palm down.

Coronel Saturnino did not appear flattered at this encomium deluged on his home town. He picked up a paper-weight and looked at it with a faint smile.

"Did the general tell you about that?"

"Oh, yes," declared Strawbridge heartily. "We buddied up from the jump. Why, I never meet a stranger. I'm just Tom Strawbridge wherever you find me."

The *coronel* passed over Mr. Strawbridge's declaration of his identity.

"Did the general's plan for canalization strike you as economically sound?" he asked with a certain quizzical expression.

"Why, sure. That's the most progressive scheme I've heard since I struck South America. I'm for it. I tell you, it's a big idea."

The *coronel* laid down the paper-weight and asked with a flavor of satire—

"Why should a colony of men canalize a semi-arid country when they can go to other parts of South America and obtain just as fertile, well-watered land without effort?"

The drummer looked at the young officer with a vague sense of sacrilege.

"Why, Good Lord man, you're not knocking your home town, are you?"

Coronel Saturnino was unaware that this was the cardinal crime in an American's calendar.

"I am stating the most elementary analysis of an economic situation," he defended, rather surprized at his guest's heat.

The drummer laughed in brief amazement at a man who would decry his place of residence for any reason under the sun.

"You certainly must never have read Edgar Z. Best's celebrated poem, 'The Trouble Is Not with Your Town—It's You!'"

"No," said Coronel Saturnino; "I never read it."

"Well, I'll try to get it for you," said the drummer in a tone which told Coronel Saturnino, that until he had read, "The Trouble Is Not with Your Town—It's You" he could never hope to stand among literate men.

Having thus, one might say, laid the foundation of the American spirit in Canalejos, Mr. Strawbridge yawned frankly and called it a day, for he said—

"If you'll be good enough to show me my bunk, I believe I'll hit the hay."

Coronel Saturnino pressed a button on his desk, and a moment later a little palace guard in uniform entered the library, carrying a rifle. The *coronel* gave a brief order, then walked to the door with his guest and bowed him out of the study.

VIII

NEXT morning the cathedral bells roused Thomas Strawbridge with dreams of fire alarms. He thought he was in a burning house, and he struggled terrifically to move a leg, to twitch an inert arm.

Somewhere in the sleeping bulk of the drummer a strange insubstantial entity sent out desperate alarm. At last a finger flexed, an eyelid trembled, then suddenly that something in the sleeper's brain expanded, flowed out through, and identified itself with the whole body. It was reinstated as a traveling salesman with trade ambitions who pursued devious ends through ways and means imposed on him by custom and training.

The drummer opened his eyes and sat up. He wiped the sweat from his face and damned the bells for waking him. The fact that by some strange means he had been cut off a moment or two from his body, that he had engaged in a terrific struggle to regain its control, did not suggest a mystery or provoke a question in Thomas Strawbridge's mind. He had had a nightmare. That explained everything. He often had nightmares. To Thomas Strawbridge's type of mind anything that happens often can not possibly contain a mystery.

Nevertheless his experience left him in a dour mood. He turned out of bed, shoved his feet into some native *alpagartas* and shuffled to the bath which adjoined his chamber. His pajamas smelled faintly of sleep.

The bath-tub was a basin of white marble, rather dirty, and built into the tiled floor. It was a young swimming-pool. Overhead was a clumsy silver nozzle on a water-pipe. The drummer turned it on, and the water which sprayed over him was neither cool nor very clean. The roaring and banging of the cathedral bells continued as if they would never leave off.

As Strawbridge soaped and rubbed, he recalled rather moodily his engagement to go with General Fombombo's force to San Geronimo. At this hour of the morning the adventure did not appeal to him. It was rather a wild-goose chase, and he decided he would tell the general he had changed his mind and have Saturnino remove his name from the lists.

The bells continued their uproar. They did not stop until the drummer had finished his bath and was back in his dressing-room. Then their silence brought into notice a distant, watery note. This came from the cataracts in the Rio Negro somewhere below Canalejos. The disquietude of the water was rumored through the room, over the city, and it spread across the llanos for miles and miles. It held a certain disagreeableness for Strawbridge. He liked a quiet morning.

Somewhere on the street a native donkey-cart rattled. The cathedral bells started again, but this time not for long; merely to gather in the faithful their previous tumult had awakened. But it all struck Strawbridge on raw nerves.

In fact every morning Strawbridge was subject to what he called his grouch. He got up with a grouch on. It was a short daily reaction from his American heartiness, his American optimism, his tendency to convert every moment into a fanfare and a balloon ascension. This early-morning depression continued until he had had his coffee and the fife-and-drum corps of his spirit started up their stridor again. It is just possible that the American flag, instead of stars, should bear forty-eight coffee beans rampant.

A woman in black passed the barred windows of Strawbridge's room. The drummer, after the manner of men, moved slowly about his window to keep her in sight as long as possible. He fussed with his tie as he did so. He watched her cross the plaza.

She passed under a row of ornamental evergreen trees which looked as if they had dark green tassels hung at regular intervals on perfectly symmetrical limbs. The grace of the tree somehow lent itself to the girl who passed beneath it. At the same moment an odor of frangipanni drifted in through the bars out of the morning.

When any man is looking at a woman any odor that comes to his nostrils automatically associates itself with her, a relic, no doubt, of our animal forebears during their mating seasons.

Strawbridge watched the girl intently until at last he had his face pressed against the bars to get a final glimpse of her at a difficult angle.

When he straightened from this rather

awkward posture and resumed his tie he became aware that the maid had entered his room with his morning coffee. She was a short girl, of dusky yellow color, and was evidently half-Indian and half-negro, or what the Venezuleans call a "griffe." She also had moved about the window to its last angular possibility, and when Strawbridge saw her she was peering with very bright, black eyes to see who had been the gentleman's quarry.

At this the drummer became acutely aware of every movement he had made. He frowned at the griffe girl.

"Here, give me the coffee; don't stand all day staring like that!"

The girl started and handed her salver nervously to him.

"Whyn't you knock when you came in?" demanded Strawbridge.

"I did, *señor*, but I thought you were asleep," she said, a little frightened.

It was the maid's custom to find her master's guests asleep, to steal in noiselessly, awaken them and administer two tablespoonuls of Venezuelan coffee, black as the pit and strong as death, in a tiny cup.

The incident of the servant girl counteracted to a certain extent the heartening effect of the coffee. Strawbridge looked out on the brightening morning and wondered if by any chance the servant girl's gossip might affect his landing General Fombombo's order for rifles, because he knew that the girl in black he had been watching at such inconvenience was the Señora Fombombo. He felt sure the griffe girl knew it also. But he decided optimistically that the girl would say nothing about it, or if she did it would have no influence on his sale.

The big, somber bedroom to which General Fombombo had assigned his guest was a good observation point, and no doubt the dictator had chosen it for this very reason. The scene at which Strawbridge was looking might have aroused enthusiasm in a more susceptible man. At an angle it gave a view of the Plaza Mayor and a glimpse of the cathedral seen through the trees.

Straight east showed a bit of paved street, and beyond that a garden with a side gate facing Strawbridge's window. A heavy hedge divided the garden from the plaza. Beyond the garden rose the walls and buttresses of the rear of the cathedral, and this was a handsome thing. In this soft morning light it was an aspiration toward God.

Past the cathedral the wide river stretched westward. Some two hundred yards down the river-bank rose another low, massive building, more heavily built and gloomier even than the *palacio*. In the uncertain light Strawbridge thought he discerned two or three figures on the flat roof of this building.

A little later the sun's limb cut the far eastern reach of the river. Distant quivering reflections marked the rapids whose subdued turmoil brooded over the city and the llanos.

The light increased momentarily. Against its widening flame blinked tiny black native boats, traversing like familiar demons the fire of some wide and splendid hell.

None of this interested Strawbridge. He stared at it through the same mechanical compulsion that causes a moth to head toward light, but he did not see it. The first thing that really caught his attention was a bugle blowing the reveille; the next breath from the top of the low building came the flash of a cannon faintly seen against the brilliant east. After an interval came a brief, hard report.

The concussion not only startled Strawbridge but it did some obscure violence to his sensibilities. It did not roar and rumble and so suggest the pomp and panoply of war. The flatness of the llanos lent no echo. The shot was just a hard, abrupt blow, a smash, then silence. There was something dismaying about it. Then Strawbridge could see the figures on the flat roof leaving their cannon and descending.

Like all good Americans who observe a foreign military demonstration, Strawbridge thought:

"That's nothing. An American army with big American guns could blow that little toy right out of existence."

Nevertheless he continued to be depressed and somehow dismayed by the hard and savage suddenness of the sunrise gun, and in his heart he determined more strongly than ever that he would not go with the army to San Geronimo. In his mind Strawbridge uttered these thoughts resolutely, and he felt himself to be one of those strong-willed men, who, having once settled on a program, never varied from it, no matter what chance befell.

A GONG announcing *almuerzo* brought the drummer out of his reverie and moved him toward the breakfast table. As he went he shook off his mood and resumed, as if he were putting on a suit of clothes, his quick American walk, his optimism and dashing business manner. As he moved briskly down the great hallway a guard with a rifle directed him to the *comidor*.

The *palacio* was divided into an eastern and a western wing by a series of patios, and the breakfast-room proved to be a little place latticed off from one of the smaller patios. The lattice was overgrown with vines. In this retreat Strawbridge found a small basketry table laid with snowy linen and holding oranges, sweet lemons, rolls and coffee.

Thanks to Strawbridge's quick movements, he was the first person there. He sat down at the table and enjoyed the sunshine glinting at him through the vines.

Through an end door of the breakfast-room he could see the *palacio* kitchen. Its principal furnishing was a Venezuelan cooking-range. This was a great stone table punctured by little iron grates, each holding a handful of charcoal fire. Above the table spread a big sheet-iron canopy to convey away the gases and fumes. Ranged on the little fires were pots and pans and boilers.

At the farther end of the kitchen a wrinkled old negress was on her knees on the earthen floor pouring boiling water into an old stocking-leg filled with ground coffee. The beverage dripped out into a silver pot which sat on the ground in front of the crone.

Beyond the negress in the sunshine stood a meat block with a machete stuck in it and a joint of meat lying on it. Around the meat the flies were so thick that they appeared to Strawbridge as a kind of wavering shadow over the block.

A sound behind the drummer caused him to turn, and he saw the Señora Fombombo, still clad in her religious black and evidently just returned from early mass. Sight of her gave Strawbridge a certain faint satisfaction, but at the same time it brought back the vague embarrassment he had felt on the previous evening. He returned her salutation of "*Buenos dias*" and was pondering something else to say when she expressed a fear that the sight of a Venezuelan *cocina* (kitchen) would be disagreeable to him. She had heard how spotless were American kitchens.

The salesman began a hasty assurance that the kitchen was very interesting, but the *señora* called to a servant to close the shutter. The same griffe girl whom Strawbridge had seen that morning answered the call, and before she retired she gave the *señora* and the salesman a certain understanding look, which linked up in Strawbridge's mind with what the girl had seen an hour or two earlier.

The *señora* herself was proceeding with her table talk.

"We can get only native servants here in Canalejos," she was saying in the faintly mechanical manner of a hostess who has an uninteresting guest, "and they prepare everything in the native way."

Strawbridge said he liked Venezuelan cooking.

"It is monotonous," criticized the *señora*. "The chicken is always cooked with rice, and the plantains are always fried."

Strawbridge started to say that he loved chicken and rice and fried plantains, but even his imperfect sense of rhetoric warned him that he had already overworked those particular phrases. So he checked that sentiment, cast about for a substitute and finally fished up—

"I saw you going to early mass this morning, *señora*."

The girl glanced at him, agreed to this and continued peeling her orange with a knife and fork in the Venezuelan fashion.

The drummer wanted strongly to follow this opening with something brisk and lively to compel her attention and interest, but his head seemed oddly empty. His embarrassment persisted and made him a little uncomfortable. He wondered why. It was irritating.

Why didn't he tell her a joke, one of his "parlor" jokes? Strawbridge knew scores and scores of obscene jokes, and perhaps half a dozen "parlor" jokes which he kept for women. Now to his discomfiture he could not recall a single one of his "parlor" jokes.

There seemed to be something wrong with him. At his home in Keokuk the salesman had the name of being quite a blade among the women. But for some reason or other, he told himself, the *señora* crabbed his style. He wondered why. He looked at the girl across the table and attempted to understand why she so thoroughly crabbed his style.

She was a smallish woman with rather a slender, melancholy face, and her eyes had that slightly unfocused look which is characteristic of all pure black eyes. Her brows and lips were engraved in black and red against a pale, colorless face. Her nun's bonnet, and the black cloth that passed beneath it across her forehead, concealed the least trace of hair.

And Strawbridge speculated with a sort of apprehension whether or no she really had shaved her head nun fashion. If so, it was a bitter price for her sister's recovery.

DURING these meditations, however, the salesman was not dumb. He automatically started one of those typically American conversations which consist in a long string of disconnected questions asked without any object whatever.

Strawbridge himself regretted these questions. He had hoped to do something amusing and rather brilliant.

"Have you lived here long, *señora?*"

"About two years. I came here immediately after I was married to General Fombombo."

"Then you were not married here?"

"No; in Spain."

"Then you are a Spanish girl?"

"Yes; I lived in Barcelona."

"How do you like it here?"

"Very well."

"I suppose you miss the stir. I hear Barcelona is the livest town in Spain."

"I believe it is," she agreed a little uncertainly.

"What do they export? Anything besides olive-oil? I understand they export a lot of olive-oil."

Señor Fombombo touched her slender fingers to her lips a moment and then she said she believed they exported olive-oil.

"I suppose the girls go in for business over there, too; bookkeepers, you know; stenogs, clerks, cash girls?"

"Ye-e-es."

"What was your line before you married?"

The *señora* came awake and looked at the drummer.

"My *line?*"

"Yes," said Strawbridge, becoming a little less of an automaton and a little more a human being. "What was your job before you hooked up with the general?"

The *señora* almost stared at the American. Then she drew in her under lip and seemed to compress it rigorously, thoughtfully, perhaps to assist her in recalling what her line was before she hooked up with the general. Then she said—

"I—I did a little music."

"Teach?" probed the American.

"Well—no—really I'm afraid I didn't do anything."

Strawbridge nodded as if some puzzle had been solved for him.

"Now that's where you made your mistake," he explained paternally.

"A woman ought to have a job just the same as a man. She ought to be able to hold over her goods until the market is right.

"Now take me. Suppose I had to sell my rifles right now because I didn't have the overhead to keep them ninety days longer, I'd be in a bad way. It's the same way with you girls. With no overhead it's no wonder you married Ge——"

He caught himself up abruptly, aghast at whither his monolog had led him. He floundered mentally in an effort to turn off his implication, but all he could do was simply to moisten his lips and quit talking. He wondered chillily if the *señora* had caught it.

Apparently she had not. A spray of red flowers swung near her from the vine. She drew a raceme to her face and began talking smoothly.

"I know feminism is very modern and up-to-date, but somehow we Spanish women don't do it. We are as idle as this flower."

She turned and looked at the flower.

"This variety of wistaria grew in my garden in Barcelona; that's why I had it planted here. It reminds me of home."

She looked up from the flower at the American, smiled faintly and added rather disconnectedly—

"It may seem queer to you, Señor Strawbridge, but once I very nearly entered a convent in Barcelona."

By this time Strawbridge was convinced that she had not observed his false step. He was still warm, sweaty and a little shivery, but he was recovering. He said very simply and truthfully:

"Well, I'm glad you didn't. If I have to stay in Canalejos I'm glad there is an agreeable woman in it to talk to."

The *señora* expressed her pleasure if she could enliven his stay at Canalejos. As they talked Coronel Saturnino entered the breakfast-room. He bowed to the *señora* and inquired of Strawbridge in his somewhat amused voice if he had slept well after his enlistment.

Oh, yes; he had slept like a top.

"Enlistment?" echoed the *señora.*

"*Seguramente,*" smiled the *coronel.* "Señor Strawbridge has enlisted in the cavalry to march against San Geronimo."

Señora Fombombo seemed utterly astonished. She stared at the *coronel,* then at the drummer.

"You don't mean Señor Strawbridge will be in the cavalry attack on San Geronimo?"

"Yes, *señora;* I arranged his billet last night."

The *coronel* made a smiling bow.

The girl turned on the American.

"But why are you going to fight at San Geronimo, *señor?*"

Strawbridge hesitated, cleared his throat, glanced through the vine-grown lattice into the sunshine, then apparently came to some inward decision.

"Now it's like this, *señora,*" he began, getting back the ring and confidence in his voice which had heretofore been missing. "It's like this. In order to meet your client's needs you've got to get first-hand information."

Strawbridge patted his right fingers against his left palm and looked the *señora* firmly in the eye for the first time.

"Before you can grasp your patron's problems you've got to make 'em yours. Why, the first thing my old man said to me, he said, 'Strawbridge, an expert salesman is first aid to the financially injured; he's the star of Bethlehem to the sinners of commerce.' He's a cutter, my old man is—I wish you could know him, *señora.*"

"You mean your father?" hazarded the President's wife.

"Holy mackerel, woman, no!" cried the drummer with a touch of Keokuk gusto in his voice. "I mean my boss, the head knocker of my firm. Great old chap, and rich as limburger cheese. Say, he owns fifty-one per cent. of the company's stock, and he started in as a water-boy. How do you like that?"

Mr. Strawbridge gave his auditors a little triumphant smile.

"*Caramba!* Very American, I say," laughed the *coronel.*

The *señora* interposed quickly—

"And very good and very fine, I say, Señor Strawbridge!"

She looked at the *coronel* with a certain little light in her eye, then added emphatically—

"I am sure I should like him."

She was rising to leave the table.

Coronel Saturnino, who was about to seat himself, said—

"If I agree to his admirable qualities I wonder if you would stay and eat another orange, *señora?*"

But the girl pleaded that she must practise some music in the cathedral.

Strawbridge hesitated half-way out of his chair. He was undecided whether to stay with Coronel Saturnino or to go with the *señora.* He decided for the latter and walked out of the breakfast-room with her, but he was vaguely embarrassed for fear he had done the wrong thing.

IX

THIS talk at the breakfast table with Señora Fombombo braced the spirits of Thomas Strawbridge. The girl seemed to hold a kind of comfort for the drummer. Now as he walked down the long marble steps of the *presidencia* the tropical sunshine slanting into the plaza, the cries of gathering street venders, the rattle of carts, the stir of pigeons in the cathedral tower, all conspired to speed Mr. Strawbridge's thoughts and energy along their customary channel, that is to say toward the selling of merchandise. He was in fettle, and he wanted to sell hardware. He felt so full of power he believed he could sell anything to anybody.

And the Señora Fombombo was in some degree responsible for this exaltation. A pleasant woman always grooms a man for a fine deed. So it was the Spanish girl who sent the big blond American striding through the plaza, smiling to himself and seeking whom he might sell.

It was Strawbridge's plan to go to the general-merchandise stores in Canalejos and stock them up on hardware by the mere *élan* and warmth of his approach. It is conceivable that enough Thomas Strawbridges, a whole army of them, could bankrupt the manufacturing interests of all foreign nations, could wither them right out of existence in the overpowering sunshine of their good-fellowship and love for humanity.

As Mr. Strawbridge hurried through the plaza, filled, one might say, with this destructive amiability, he was accosted by a voice asking him if he did not desire a fortune of ten million pesetas.

The drummer looked around and saw a lottery vender holding out his sheaf of tickets. He was offering coupons on the National Spanish Lottery, an institution which circulates its chances all over South America, including even insurgent Rio Negro.

The good fairy who was offering this chance of fortune was a ragged man whose lean ribs and belly could be seen through the rents in his clothes. The American paused, took the sheaf and looked at the tickets curiously. Each ticket was a long strip of small coupons which could be torn into ten pieces and divided among indigent buyers. They were vilely printed on the cheapest of paper.

Strawbridge stood looking at the tickets and shaking his head.

"Life," he told the ticket-seller, was "what a man made it," and he could not afford to mix up his solid success with lottery chances and such like. What he wanted was certainties and not moonshine. Here he handed back the sheaf and moved on briskly through the plaza, a big, well-tailored American, the example of a man who had taken his life in his own hands and had molded it into a warm and shining success.

The vender stared emptily after the drummer. Never before had his hope of a sale inflated so suddenly or collapsed so morally and so completely.

Strawbridge had gone only a little way when a man came running out of a *bodega* that was down a side street. He was waving his sombrero and calling Strawbridge's name. The American stood in doubt whether he had heard aright, for no one in Canalejos knew his name, and then he saw a wad of hair on the shouter's head and he recognized the bull-fighter.

Felipe came up quickly and somewhat unsteadily. His face was flushed; his black eyes glistened with alcohol, and his bull-fighter's pigtail was somewhat awry.

"I was just starting to the *palacio* to see you, *señor*," he began a little thickly. "I was just starting when my *compadre* in the *bodega* says, 'There goes the *Americano* now,' so out I came."

"What can I do for you?" asked the drummer with brief patience.

The *torero* grinned laxly.

"You were my *camarado* coming here from Caracas, *señor;* you remember, we rode all the way together."

"Sure; get to your point."

Felipe straightened.

"Well, would you see your *camarado* wronged? Are you going to see him turned into a laughing-stock?"

"You've turned yourself into a laughing-stock; you're drunk."

"*Caramba,* whose fault is it?"

"Why, yours, of course!"

The bull-fighter spread the fingers of both hands on his chest.

"I! It is no fault of mine; the President did this!"

"Aw, you're talking nonsense."

"No, it is true; the fault is with el General Fombombo. I am no tippler. I am a bull-fighter.

"That's what I wanted to see you about. You are a *caballero* and a friend of the President. You can stand up and talk to him, but he sends me off to see the bull-ring. You know, you heard him yesterday, sending me off to see the bull-ring the moment he clapped eyes on me."

Strawbridge was faintly amused.

"Is that what you want me to see him about—because he dismissed you yesterday?"

Felipe was only slightly intoxicated, and now his anger sobered him completely.

"No! No! What do I care for his contempt? I, too, am a Venezuelan; but, *señor*, when any man interferes with my paternal rights—" he tapped himself threateningly on his powerful chest—"I am a bull-fighter."

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"*Ca!* Madruja!"

"But your paternal rights!"

Felipe flung out exasperated hands. "Didn't you hear her father, the old man in the reds, place her in my care?"

"Yes. Well, what has happened?"

"Enough! I saw Madruja carried by the

guards to one of the rooms in the west side of the palace. Very good. I followed and marked the room. The windows seemed rather old; perhaps the bars could be bent. I did not know. I was in her father's place. It was my duty to see."

Strawbridge's interest picked up as a man's always does when a woman is introduced in the narrative.

"Yes, I fancy you would be very strict about your daughter. Then what?"

"Well, last night I slept in the dressing-room at the bull-ring. That is, I tried to sleep, but I could not. I kept thinking of my daughter, Madruja, the little bride pining for Esteban. I got up and walked out into the bull-ring, thinking of the lonely little bride. Ah, *señor*, there were stars. I can never look at stars without thinking of the eyes of brides——"

Felipe shivered, reached up and straightened his hair a trifle, then went on:

"I said to myself: '*Ca!* A man who stumbles goes all the faster if he does not fall.'

"So I made up my mind. I went back in the dressing-room, found my guitar in the dark and started for the *Presidencia*. *Señor*, you will believe it when I tell you I was trembling all the way like a mimosa-leaf.

"I slipped very quietly around the plaza, past the Department of *Fomento* and so to the *palacio* window where my little daughter Madruja slept. I came up softly and tried the bars with all my strength, and although I am a bull-fighter, *señor*, they did not budge."

The drummer stood looking at the veins in the bull-fighter's forehead. The fellow went on.

"There was nothing to do, *señor*, but to sing—to sing a love song to my little Madruja and perhaps she would come to the window, or open the door if she could. I touched the chords and began singing '*La Encantadora*' softly into the window just for her.

"For minutes nothing stirred; but I have a tender voice, *señor*. You know; you have heard me sing. It will melt any woman's heart. I began, '*Mi alma, mi amour perdida*.'

"Oh, *señor*, it was a sobbing, plaintive song, and when I had finished and stood holding my breath something moved in the darkness. There came a little clinking on the window-sill, and I saw a faint gleam of metal. It was a gold coin, *señor;* then the voice of General Fombombo said:

" 'That is Felipe, is it not? Sing to us all night long, Felipe.' "

Strawbridge opened his eyes and thrust his head forward.

"What!" he cried.

"By five thousand devils on horseback, it's true!"

Felipe flung up his arms.

"And me there, her father! My head grew hot. I went insane! I told General Fombombo I was in her father's place; that I, Felipe, was in her father's place; but the general only laughed and said:

" 'Sing, sing to us, Felipe. As to your paternal duties, your ideas went out of date with the Neanderthal man five hundred thousand years ago.' "

The *torero* came to a pause breathing heavily; then after a moment he asked more rationally—

"Now what did he mean by that, do you suppose?"

The dictator's quip, jest or philosophy, whatever it was, had not registered at all with Strawbridge. He stood staring at Felipe and suddenly began laughing. The bull-fighter became offended at once, and Strawbridge began gasping an apology in the midst of his mirth. He got out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"Ex-excuse me, Felipe, b-but wh-what did he say? 'S-S-Sing all night, s-s-s——' "

His effort at the "s" rippled into laughter again.

Felipe flung up his hands in disgust.

"*Canastos!* What a man! To see a young girl deflowered—and laugh!"

The bull-fighter turned on his heel, perfectly sober, and walked away.

Strawbridge also became sober, he even frowned.

"——, putting it like that!"

Then he shrugged and continued his unspoken soliloquy—

"Well, what better could you expect from a bunch of Venezuelans — just natives——"

His good-natured face began to form another smile until he thought of Señora Fombombo. Then he became serious enough. The Spanish girl seemed to raise some obscure question in his mind. He made a hazy effort or two to clarify that question, but nothing came of it.

WITH this Mr. Strawbridge removed his thoughts from the incident and proceeded to canvass the town in the interest of the Union Arms and Metallic Company. He walked out of Plaza Mayor into a narrow dirty *calle* which was the principal street of the city. It was lined with the usual ill-lighted, inconvenient business houses which characterize Venezuelan towns; a roulette establishment, a charcoal and kindling store with a box of half-decayed mangoes as a side line, a gloomy book-store with the works of Vargas Vila lying back up on a table outside.

The first general-merchandise store he found had a single bolt of calico on display. Above the bolt swung the name of the store in faded letters—

Sol y Sombra

This complete absence of attractive displays was a real pain to the American. It spurred his commercial missionary spirit. He entered the dark *Sol y Sombra*. It had once been an ancient dwelling. Its use had been changed from domestic to mercantile ends by the simple expedients of knocking out some partitions and roofing an old patio. In fact when a Venezuelan merchant covers an old patio and thereby adds to his floor space he has just about uttered the last word in Venezuelan progressiveness.

Strawbridge turned into the shop and asked for the proprietor. The proprietor had not arrived, but one of the clerks offered his services. The American told the clerk his name and vigorously grasped his limp hand.

"I'm a hardware man," began Strawbridge briskly, "and now if you'll just carry me back to your hardware department we'll check through and see what you're short on. Then I can hand your boss the lists and prices of the very things he needs and save him a lot of time."

The clerk was a small, withered youth with sad brown eyes that resembled a monkey's. He looked at Strawbridge and said—

"My employer will have all the time there is when he gets here, *señor*."

"Um—well—we can shove the deal through quicker anyway."

The little clerk turned and started doubtfully toward the hardware department. It was clear that he did not want to go, but he could not hold his ground against the dynamic force of Strawbridge's enthusiasm. As he moved along he said—

"You are an American, aren't you?"

"Travel out of New York, but my home's in Keokuk. Great little burg; thirty thoussand population and thirty-five hundred automobiles, not to mention flivvers——"

Here Mr. Strawbridge laughed heartily, sharing the wide-spread American conviction that to make a distinction between an automobile and a flivver was the most amusing flight of human wit.

"And, say," he added when he had finished his lonely laughing. "I wish you could see the Keokuk window displays; give you some pointers, young man."

The young man was smiling agreeably, so the drummer turned to business.

"Well," he began optimistically, "trade picking up here as everywhere, I suppose."

The monkey-eyed youth agreed without enthusiasm.

"Your export trade showing any strength?"

"I am only a clerk, *señor;* I have no export trade."

"Yes, I know; I meant——"

It became clear that it was not worth while to pursue this topic.

They had reached the hardware department. The clerk stood silent while Mr. Strawbridge looked around him. The stock was fuller than the American had expected.

A sudden idea occurred to Strawbridge.

"Look here, why don't you get out a big display of this stuff? You could push out a lot of it."

"I have no interest here at all, *señor*," repeated the little man, concealing a yawn with his fingers. "I'm just a clerk."

Strawbridge broke into cheerful irritation.

"Why —— it, man, if you'll make this business your own some day it will be your own. Right here is your chance to use your initiative, throw some pep into this establishment. Get this thing moving and you'll be the candy kid around here."

Strawbridge gave the prospective candy kid a cheerful blow on the shoulder designed to knock energy into him. A constructive impulse seized the American.

"Say, I'm quite a lad when it comes to window-dressing. Let's bundle a lot of this stuff out front and fix up something of a scream by the time the old man arrives!"

Strawbridge beamed down on the little

clerk like a benevolent giant. Next moment he caught up an armful of ropes, plow-points, hoes and door-hinges and was lugging them toward the front of the store.

The feather of a clerk tried to resist the American whirlwind.

"But, *señor*, wait one minute! *Nombre de Dios! Señor*, for God's sake stop! What you are doing is mad!"

Strawbridge was annoyed.

"Mad the ——! It's the only sensible thing in Canalejos; give your joint a prosperous, up to date look."

"But, *señor*, we don't want to look prosperous and up to date."

"What!"

The American was scandalized.

"Don't want to look up to date! What's eating you?"

"Nothing. We don't want to because it will raise our taxes; we will be forced to pay larger contributions to the governor. *Caramba, señor;* you do not know this country!"

Strawbridge came to a halt at last.

"Your taxes will be raised if you look prosperous!"

"*Seguramente!*" affirmed the clerk excitedly. "To look prosperous is a sort of crime in Venezuela. If we seem *too* well off perhaps the dictator will take over our whole business; we dare not risk it. So we keep everything out of sight. That is best."

Thomas Strawbridge stood confounded. He doubted his ears.

"Look here—is that straight goods?"

"It is true, *señor*," asseverated the little man solemnly, "if that is what you mean."

"But take your business from you—take it *from* you!"

The clerk evidently thought the American did not understand his Spanish, for he elucidated—

"I mean occupy it, to receive the money, to have the key to the door."

Strawbridge stood staring at the little fellow, wondering if such a fantastic situation could be true.

"Did you ever know of such a case?" he asked slowly.

"*Sin embargo*, a friend of mine had a ranch near the President's. It was a good ranch with water so well placed that it stayed green each Summer much longer than the President's own. So suddenly one day of a very dry Summer soldiers came to my friend's *estancia* and carried away him and all his peons.

"Then it lay vacant a week or two. No one dared go on it. Then the President ran his fences around it and claimed it as waste land."

"That really happened?"

"*Sí, señor.*"

"What happened to the poor —— of a rancher and his peons?"

"Oh, the peons were put in the army, and the man——"

The clerk shrugged and nodded his head in a certain direction. Strawbridge did not know to what he referred.

The American replaced the goods he had chosen for display and stood in the wareroom rather stunned. A sort of horripilation ran over his skin as he pondered the clerk's story. Under such a Government all business was in jeopardy.

"Why, good God, that's awful!" he said aloud. "That'll *ruin* business! If a fellow's investments are not protected, then—" he made a hopeless gesture—"then what in God's name do they hold sacred here?"

The clerk gave a Latin shrug of despondency.

"*Ca, señor*, they hold nothing sacred here. Why, even our sisters and betrothed are violated——"

Strawbridge lifted a hand and waggled a finger for silence.

"Yes, I know that old stuff. But business! Not to respect a man's investment—these people are savages!"

X

THOMAS STRAWBRIDGE left *Sol y Sombra* and started back up the street, hurrying out of habit; but he had no objective. His conversation with the little monkey-eyed clerk had suddenly explained to the drummer the squalor and filth of Canalejos. It was an intentional filth, deliberately chosen to escape Govermental mulcting. In short, Venezuelan cities were especially designed to do business in the worst possible way and with the greatest amount of friction and inconvenience.

Strawbridge was bewildered. He had come from a country where the whole machinery of Governemnt is built for the especial purpose of expediting business. Now this sudden reversal of *motif* seemed to him a mad thing.

His gait slowed down with the complexity of his thoughts. He jammed his hands thoughtfully into his trousers pockets and played with some small coins. Once he scratched unconsciously at a flea in the crotch of his legs.

What was the object of it? If men did not organize a Government to promote business, why did any exist? Why did the shop-keepers persist in running their dirty little shops? Why did the peons go and come, the fishermen labor up and down the rapids? If business was strangled, what reason was there for life to go on?

The drummer's steps had led him back to Plaza Mayor, and by this time the square was full of people. Most of them were loiterers, sitting on the park benches gazing listlessly at the palms, the ornamental evergreens, or watching the drip of a fountain too clogged to play.

In the center of the plaza was a statue, and the drummer was somewhat surprized to observe that it was a full-length figure of General Fombombo. The statue was of heroic size and held out in its hands a scroll bearing the words—

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

There was a slow movement among the idlers toward the cathedral. *Señoritas* came by with their missals, beggars with their cups. Youths and well-dressed men took a last puff at their eternal cigarets, tossed away the stubs and wandered toward the gloomy temple.

Strawbridge had never been in a Catholic church in his life. In fact, since his boyhood he had scarcely been in any sort of church. Now his desire for silence and a place to think out the riddle he had found drew him through the deeply recessed archway of the cathedral.

On one of the columns Strawbridge saw the holy water in a shell of a size that amazed him in a superficial way. He passed on in and immediately forgot the shell.

The interior of the church was a semi-darkness punctuated here and there with groups of candles flickering before the different altars. To the right hand of the entrance he saw a life-size effigy of the crucifixion. The head of the figure drooped to one side, and the whole body was painted the pallor of death.

The drummer stood looking at this figure with the impersonal and faintly interested eyes of an American tourist. As he stood, an old man with an aura of white hair shuffled up before the crucifix, laid down a bundle on the stone floor, spread a filthy handkerchief and knelt stiffly on it. Then he stared fixedly at the effigy, spread out his old arms to it, and his lips began moving beneath his tobacco-stained beard.

In his earnestness his old head shook and nodded; he reached up his scrawny arms farther and farther as if to pull down from the figure the good he was seeking. He arose and went; other men took his place—young men, well-dressed men; they went through their devotions openly and unashamed.

But Strawbridge was somehow shamed before them. It seemed to him a vaguely improper thing for a man to be seen praying in public. In North America to pray in public is a sort of test of audacity, not to say brazenness. In North America one who prays in public seldom thinks about God; he thinks about how he looks and what the people are thinking about his prayer. Now for these Venezuelans to pray to God earnestly and unaffectedly in the open made Strawbridge vaguely uncomfortable, as if they were appearing in public wearing too few clothes.

The women, on the other hand, somehow pleased Strawbridge. As each *señorita* and *señora* came in with a white handkerchief spread over her black hair, touched the holy water to her forehead, lips and breast and then knelt to pray, it gave the drummer a queer sense of intimacy and pleasure.

Presently reading and responses began in one of the chapels hidden from the American. The voice of the priest would rise in a muffled swell and then taper into silence again; a moment later this would be followed by a hushed babble of women's voices. There was something sad in the reading and responses. The same words were repeated over and over and filled the cathedral with a monotonous and melancholy music.

As Strawbridge stood musing among these frail and unaccustomed pleasures, his mind moved vaguely about the question which had brought him there: What could the Venezuelans find in life to take the place of business? Upon what other cord could any man string the rosary of his days? As the women came and went, as the responses filled the church with a many-tongued music, as the odor of incense flattered the gloom, Strawbridge pondered his question but could find no answer.

The drummer found a seat near a column of the nave and relaxed himself, American fashion, with his legs spread out and his arms lying along the back of the bench. He quit thinking toward any point and allowed his fancies to drift idly.

The life of the cathedral slowly developed itself around him. A woman was on her knees just inside the altar rail, scrubbing the tiled floor. Some acolytes in lace robes were gathered in the transept, perhaps waiting to take part in some later mass. A priest in his cassock loitered near a confessional, evidently expecting a penitent.

Presently a little girl did come and step into the double stall of the confessional. The father moved into the other side with the slowness of a heavy man and lifted the little shutter in the partition with a mechanical movement. The child placed her face in the aperture and began to whisper.

Strawbridge sat and looked at the priest and the little girl with a dreamy emptiness. He could feel the bench pressing his body and catch the queer fragrance of the incense. Presently the child stepped out of the confessional and began a round of the stations, kneeling and telling her beads before each one.

A beggar entered the booth and presently went away. A few moments later, to the drummer's surprize, Coronel Saturnino came down the aisle and stepped into the confessional. The officer put his mouth to the orifice and whispered steadily for five or ten minutes. Strawbridge could see his profile against the darkness of the booth, a handsome, almost flawless, profile with a faint sardonic molding about the nose and the corners of the mouth even in this moment of confession.

Strawbridge wondered vaguely what he was confessing, what kind of sins Saturnino committed?

JUST then a hand touched the American's outstretched arm. The drummer looked around and saw Gumersindo standing at the back of his seat.

The negro bowed slightly with his thick lips smiling. Strawbridge aroused himself and was really glad to see Gumersindo. He got up and joined the colored man.

"Lots of folks in church today," he whispered.

The negro nodded.

"The cavalry expect to go to San Geronimo soon. There is always a crowding-in for confession before such an expedition."

"Oh—I see."

Strawbridge was rather taken aback. He looked across at the opposite aisle where two or three soldiers were standing near another confessional awaiting their turn.

"Do they really believe anything is going to happen to them?"

"Why, they know it!"

Gumersindo considered Strawbridge, faintly surprized at such a question; then he evidently decided it was one of those unconsidered queries such as every one makes at times, for he passed to another subject,

"Would you like to go down into the crypt?"

Stawbridge agreed with his mind still hovering about San Geronimo. The negro led the way, tiptoeing through the great, murmuring cathedral.

"There's a great painting in that chapel," he said, pointing into one as they passed, but not stopping to enter it.

"You must see it some day."

Strawbridge said he would and immediately forgot it.

They passed through the transept and around behind the high altar. In this passage they found another priest walking slowly back and forth, reading some religious book.

Gumersindo introduced Strawbridge to Father Benicio. The priest's face held the worn, ascetic look of a Benedictine who endures the ardors of the tropics.

"Señor Strawbridge is the American gentleman whom I brought back from Caracas," proceeded the editor. "Perhaps you noticed my article about him in the *Correo?*"

"I have not see today's *Correo*," said the father, looking at the American with the shrewd eyes of his calling.

Gumersindo was already drawing a damp copy of his paper from his pocket. He opened the limp sheet and handed it to the priest with his finger pointing to the article. Then he turned away and pretended to inspect the carving on the reredos but kept glancing toward the readers to see what effect his article was producing.

The article itself was typical Spanish-American rhetoric. It referred to Strawbridge as a merchant prince, a distinguished manufacturer, a world-famous exporter, and once it called him the illustrious Vulcan of the liberal arts, a flourish based on the fact that Strawbridge sold hardware.

When they had finished reading, the black man turned with his face beaming in anticipation of praise.

"Elegantly done, Gumersindo," pæaned the priest. "You have a very rich style."

The editor lifted his brows.

"I never hope to command a style, father; I always write simply. It is all I can do."

Father Benicio patted the black man's arm and smiled the rather bloodless smile of the repressed.

"He is a fountain of eloquence and doesn't know it; don't you think so, Señor Strawbridge?"

"I was never called so many fine names in all my life," murmured Strawbridge in the repressed tones all three men were using. "I must have a bundle of these papers to send home."

Gumersindo beamed and said all Strawbridge needed to do was to give him the names and he would mail out copies direct. Then he proposed going down into the crypt.

The father was agreeable. He gathered his cassock about him for convenience in descending the steps, produced a key, opened a small door in the back wall of the cathedral, then, apologizing for preceding his guests, stepped into the opening.

The American followed the editor and groped down a flight of clammy steps into a cellar about ten feet deep. The priest presently found a match and a candle and lighted the cold, unventilated crypt.

In the dim light Father Benicio pointed out some old stone slabs set in the sides of the crypt with half-obliterated names carved upon them. Then he began a recountal of the doings of the first Benedictines who had come into the Orinoco country in 1573.

They had formed a flourishing colony, but the evil deeds of the Guipuzcoana Company had provoked the Indians to attack the religious colony and many of the monks were massacred. These gravestones marked those early martyrs.

The priest told this tale with a certain fire. Those early fathers were links in a chain to which he himself belonged. Their constancy, their devotion to duty, their faithfulness unto death, were ensamples often in his heart which warmed his monastic life.

Strawbridge did not feel the faintest interest in Father Benicio's recital. He looked at the stone slabs without any widening of his vision of the past. Indeed anything that antedated the 1890's was without interest to Strawbridge.

To the drummer history had no connection with the present. If he had analyzed his impressions he would have found that he believed that all the acts of mankind prior to the 90's formed history and were completely cut asunder from the press and importance of to-day.

The world in which Mr. Thomas Strawbridge lived and had his being was absolutely new and up-to-date. It was like a new steam-heated apartment house with all the elevators running and the water connections going, and it was utterly cut off from all the past efforts and struggles of mankind.

History, to Mr. Strawbridge, was not even the blue-prints, the brick and mortar out of which this house was built. It was simply a kind of confusion that went on in the world until men settled down and produced something worth while; that is to say, the American nation and the New York sky-scrapers.

He yawned under his fingers.

"I wonder what they did for a living back there?"

He touched one of the stones with his foot.

Father Benicio glanced around at him.

"They raised maize, bananas and a few chickens," he said dryly.

"Ship 'em back to—Spain?" hazarded the drummer.

"No; they simply lived on what they cultivated and what the Indians gave them."

The salesman's interest flickered out completely. He glanced at the gravestones of these unenterprising monks and moved a step toward the stairs.

Gumersindo attempted to stir up

human interest by pointing out a slab of stone in the bottom of the crypt.

"This is not a gravestone; it conceals the entrance of a tunnel. The early Spanish settlers were great troglodytes, Señor Strawbridge. It is impossible to find an old castle or an old church without a tunnel or two leading into it."

"It was necessary in those unsettled times when a man's house was likely to be burned with the man in it unless he could slip out," put in the priest.

"Where does it lead to?" asked Strawbridge, taking rather more interest in this purely mechanical arrangement than in the human background which caused the tunnels to be dug.

"One branch leads down to the river, another to the *palacio* and another to the prison, La Fortuna."

Strawbridge suppressed another yawn and dimissed the tunnels from his mind. His thoughts came back to the original problem which had brought him to the cathedral. He broke out rather abruptly—

"Say, I suppose both of you fellows know about the general and his—er—business methods?"

Editor and priest looked at their guest quite blankly.

"I mean his method of—well—of confiscating ranches and horses and stores, provisions and such-like. Now that's a rotten way to do. I was wondering whether a good, straightforward talk with him wouldn't help some?"

By now the two men were staring at Strawbridge as if one of the old monks had risen out of his tomb.

"*Señor*," said the priest in a queer voice, "would you have the goodness to explain yourself?"

"Sure. A chap told me while ago that the general arrrested a rancher and took his ranch. I've been thinking about it all morning."

"The ranch to which your informant alludes," said Gumersindo in a cold voice, "was deserted, and General Fombombo occupied it as waste land."

The drummer laughed friendlily.

"Yes, I know about that; but just how the general hunched the man off his ranch has nothing to do with it. I say any kind of hunching is bad business."

The drummer's earnestness became convincing.

"Now look here. Both you fellows know the only way to make a country pay is through business. You look at these old monks—" he nodded at the stones—"fizzled out because they didn't develop their holdings. I don't know just w hat they did do, but it is clear they built this church instead of building a factory. No returns; see? All overhead and no production.

"Not that I'm against praying," added Strawbridge with a placating gesture toward the priest. "I'm for it. I think it peps one up; but as my old man says, 'Get in your prayers when there is no customer in sight,' see? Just to come down to facts, these old boys didn't run on business principles.

"Now here's what I'm driving at. The general's idea of grabbing things balls up the market. Your market has got to be open, and it's got to be protected before you get any real big volume of trade.

"Any man in General Fombombo's shoes can get better returns in the way of legitimate taxes on legitimate business than he can by grabbing what's in sight and scaring off business men. For let me tell you the eagle on the dollar is just about the timidest bird you ever tried to get to roost in your hen-house, and that's straight."

Strawbridge came to an earnest and apparently a questioning pause. The editor and the priest stood looking at him in the candlelight quite as silent as the ancient and unbusiness-like monks beneath their feet. After a while the editor asked in a strange voice—

"Why have you—said these things to us, Señor Strawbridge?"

"I'm asking your advice."

"About what?"

"About talking this over with the general. I believe he is making a business mistake. He would realize more if he would boost business instead of knocking it. Did you ever read Ben Bartlett's little poem?

"It's better to boost than to knock;
It's better to help than to shove.
We're brothers all on the road of Life,
And the Law of the Road is Love."

The editor said he had never read it.

"The thing I'm driving at," proceeded the drummer, "would it be good business for me to spring this on the general? You see, I might queer a big order for rifles.

Still if he could see the real business side of this situation I might establish a market for millions of dollars' worth of hardware. What do you think about it? Would you run the risk?"

The priest chose to answer—

"Our President is rather a man of impulse, Señor Strawbridge."

The big American nodded.

"I see what you mean," and he looked at Gumersindo.

"The future is always uncertain, Señor Strawbridge."

Strawbridge nodded.

"Uh-huh. I see you agree with Father Benicio."

He paused, thinking, and finally said—

"Well—I don't know——"

He continued pondering the problem before him and presently quoted perhaps subconsciously from some American poet of business:

> "Did you speak that word of warning?
> Did you act the part of friend?
> Do your duty resolutely,
> It means dollars in the end."

TO BE CONTINUED

RIVER LIFE

by Raymond S. Spears

AN ANXIOUS boy dreads the tameness of the present and future. The lurid past seems to have been a greater period in which to live than is the present. The fact is, where once the utter simplicity of life meant hunting, fishing, fighting savages and enduring hardships, including hunger, we have now every opportunity for old-time difficulties, and all the adventures of modern developments.

Fine experience lies at one's own doorstep.

The Mississippi river from St. Paul to the Gulf of Mexico, the Missouri from Fort Benton to the Gulf, the Ohio, Tennessee, Cumberland, Arkansas, Red—some 10,000 miles of navigable stream, and some 50,000 miles of skiff or canoe waters in the Mississippi Basin alone, offer everything but wild Indians to navigators.

A few hundred youths and adults do discover the wonderland of experience that lies at their perfect command. While hundreds of thousands long for the waterway, only a few really take advantage of what is offered. A trip down the upper and lower Mississippi ought to be included in every university course; skiff, motorboat or shanty-boat navigation down that river would color the life, broaden the view-point, and increase the resourcefulness of every one undertaking it. The river supplies the power, and the cost would be less than a dollar a day, for each one.

River small-boat navigation has had a big jump, owing to the very desperateness of certain types of humanity. The lower Mississippi is probably wilder, hides more lurking desperadoes and criminals, and offers as great experience as ever in its history—counting in actual numbers.

True, the honest and intelligent element is far and away more numerous in proportion.

The Mississippi, itself, has lost none of its taunts to daring spirits, as a river, and it has added countless varieties of venturesome amusement; even savage human nature does not change, but the resources of the mind give the Mississippi today what La Salle himself could never have found.

The rivers offer far more than they ever did before, and lack little that they ever had.

A PART OF EVERY MAN

by Henry M. Haldeman

THE news interest of the town ran to crime that week, and criminals. An incendiary had burned a chicken-coop; burglars had entered a racket-store.

"Burky" Blake, a real outlaw with a record, was terrorizing the trans-continental highway only a hundred miles away. Mellon, as editor of the Longvale *Weekly Echo*, sat torturing his typewriter, preparing a rehash of rumor and dispatches from the dailies to print under a two-column headline in which appeared the words—

"It never rains but it pours!"

His morning mail was brought to his desk. Mellon leaned back to enjoy a rare letter from a long-standing correspondent—a boyhood friend who was about the last link connecting Mellon with the scenes of his youth. This home letter bore the news that Gus Kraft had been sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary.

A chill ran up Kirk Mellon's spine—it never rains but it pours! He and Gus had been boys together. He hadn't thought of Kraft in years—oh, it was ages!—and now he must sit and ponder the thing. Boy friends may grow up, marry, fail, succeed, die, go to congress—but the penitentiary!

"So," thought Kirk, "that was the stuff Gus had in him—the stuff that makes a criminal! Well, well; well, well!"

One of the first things he recalled was a fight he had had with that embryo criminal. A bitter thing, that fight, waged in the mud of an old creek bottom and lasting two hours, during which time the soul of each boy had been laid bare to the other. When it was over they were friends again.

It had been years since Kirk had thought of that fight. Now he could savor the memory deliciously with the salt of mature reflection. He remembered this proverbial line—

You are a part of every man you ever knew.

"In that case," he grinned, "I suppose I'm a considerable part of Gus Kraft, criminal and murderer—well, well!"

This reflection did not lack concrete confirmation. Kirk raised his eyes. On a panel above him hung the mounted head of a fine buck. Across its antlers rested an expensive, modern, high-power sporting rifle. Gus Kraft had taught him to shoot. His earliest remembrance of this one-time chum was Gus's passion for fire-arms, for gun-powder and explosives, for anything with a capacity for noise and destruction.

Kraft, the letter said, had grown up to be a safe-blower, a two-gun fighter and murderer. Mellon, his understudy, had become secretary of the Longvale rifle club, a popular amateur sportsman and devotee of the chase. He shot deer and ran coyotes; he had to admit that he killed for the joy of it, that the sight of blood gave him a relish for his meals. Was this the Gus Kraft part of him? As for murder, he was an editor and there was the King's English——

He rose and took the rifle down, wiped it carefully with a flannel cloth and ran oiled squares of the same material through its bore. He was engaged in this reflective

---

"A Part of Every Man," copyright, 1923, by Henry M. Haldeman.

process when Prouty, the county sheriff, came in.

"Hello, Kirk—old Rain-in-the-Face!"

"Hello, hoss-thief!"

West of the hundredth meridian business processes are apt to be initiated by contumelious repartee. The official, biting at a lump of hard candy, strode on to the wall where hung a late blue-print of the surveyor's road-map. The sheriff ran his prodigious trigger-finger studiously over what represented a wild and rocky area, lying well to the south.

When he turned it was with a kind of shock that he noted Mellon's occupation.

"Who you going to kill, Kirk?" he exploded abruptly.

"I'm doing it now," said Kirk. "Time."

The sheriff squared off in his bulky way and regarded the editor with a suddenly serious and speculative air.

"How would you like a he-man's job, Kirk?"

"Fine, old hoss-thief," said Kirk without interest. "Squattyvoo—sit down."

Prouty sat down and ran out his legs. He got his candy corralled in one cheek and laced his fingers behind his head, eying Mellon.

"Why, say, Kirk; that man Burky Blake bobbed up at Melbourne yesterday. He had a run-in with the authorities and shot a deputy through the neck. He bolted from the highway and took to the hills in this direction."

The sheriff jerked his head toward the map.

Kirk whistled and laid aside his rifle.

"Coming this way! Why, sheriff, that's a compliment to you, ain't it?"

"Might be." The sheriff laughed till he strangled on sugary fluid. "There was twenty behind him, I expect. He was driving a Morse car, same one he borrowed from a doctor at Horton last week. Tom Dennison, the new State sheriff, was only three hours behind him into Melbourne. Tom got me over long-distance at four this morning and twice since. He wants two of our best riflemen. Will you go?"

"Best riflemen," reiterated Kirk. "No. That don't mean me. Why don't you get Clem Ditmore?"

The sheriff ejected his candy into the waste-basket, thus permitting himself to grin painlessly.

"Oh, Clem would *do*. Course he's a good deal better shot than you are, but y'see Clem has a family, and I had to think of that."

"The —— you did! That was sweet of you, seeing that I helped get you elected. Is it as bad as that, sheriff?"

"Don't think it isn't. Blake has two rifles in the car with him and four revolvers and I guess a mule-load of cartridges. It looks interesting. Will you go?"

"You don't give me no chance to refuse, old hoss-thief. But what you got agin *me?*"

Kirk, seriously, was a bit mystified over the sheriff's bestowal of honor.

"Oh, it just now hit me. This might be the fracas of a lifetime, and if I left you out your darn paper would ruin me. Besides," he added, "I heard you telling the other day what you'd do if you had a million dollars. There's five or six thousand in rewards up for the taking of Burky Blake."

"O-ho, I *see*," Kirk exclaimed, perceiving a fine gratitude concealed in the sheriff's words, and seeking quickly to forestall further sentiment by changing the subject.

He had never hunted anything on two feet—he thrilled now with a new expansion inside of him.

"What kind of rifles has he got, sheriff? Will they shoot farther than mine?"

"Dennison said they were Army Springfields. Which proves that Blake is the bird who got away with two guns and six bandoleers of cartridges from the Fairfax armory the other day."

"Just so," said Kirk, taking notes for an improved headline for his story. "Three hundred and sixty rounds! Why, sheriff, he could stand a siege in those hills!"

"He could," agreed the sheriff and they rose to examine the County map. "The last time he was seen was at Prince Brothers' ranch eighteen miles out of Melbourne," the sheriff pointed out. "That was this morning, early. One of the women saw a car parked in a buck-berry thicket. She got a field-glass and picked out a man by a little stream milking one of their domesticated cows."

Kirk resumed his seat and his pencil.

"Likes cream in his coffee— Who was the deputy he shot? Sit down, sheriff; sit down."

Being a politician first and a sheriff afterward, Prouty sat down; although he looked at his watch.

"Dennison is to call me again as soon as he's doped out a plan. I'll just have central switch the call here."

He took Kirk's phone and gave instructions to the operator.

"Why," he resumed, "that deputy's name is Andrews—shot through the neck. Must be a nervy bucko. Tackled Blake at a filling-station, grappled him after he was shot, and stuck and hung and bled on him till he couldn't hold on any longer. When they got busy with the wires, the main highway became too hot for Blake and he took to the hills. That's his second gun job since he broke custody less than a month ago. And I'll say, Kirk, no joking, those jobs are going to make him hard to catch."

Kirk finished his notes on the margin of the letter he had been reading before the sheriff entered.

"Look here, sheriff," he queried; "ever hear of a crook by the name of Gus Kraft?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"I used to go to school with him," Kirk grinned. "We were raised together."

"Friend of yours, eh?" Prouty sputtered mirthfully.

"Yes," admitted Kirk, "he was—we had a fight once."

"Oh, you did! Say—that's good! Who licked?"

Kirk's record as a fighter was a blank page to Sheriff Prouty. Now he noted the officer's quizzical speculation and knew him to be studying what sort of deputy Kirk would make should it come to a case of smoke and lead.

"He licked," confessed Kirk. "He whipped me three times over; but the funny thing was, he never knew it. He gave up at last and went to pieces and cried."

"The deuce he did! Cried! I thought you said he had the best of it."

"He did, in a physical sense, but his nerve played out. I was wondering if Blake is that way—if that kind of a streak runs common to criminals. Or have we all got it?"

"Don't know," said Prouty. "I wouldn't make an editor. Somebody'll find out about Blake, I expect. But don't make the mistake of discounting his nerve. He's desperate; he——"

"Don't get me wrong, sheriff," Kirk objected. "I don't know what Blake would do any more than I know what I'd do, if it came to cases. And I should worry," he laughed assuredly. "But Kraft—you see, I saw Gus in the making. For instance—" a reminiscent smile illuminated the editor's droll face— "once after school Gus and I went to look at our trot-lines—or the other fellow's, I've forgotten which. We cut through a pasture where they kept a sportive bull, lurid as Lucifer, with a nose-ring and brass-mounted horns. Kraft threw rocks at him to see what would happen. It happened quicker than I thought it would. I took to a tree—never did know I was such a climber!"

The details came back to Kirk as he talked; each picture that he drew was endorsed by the sheriff in mutual enthusiasm and these two oldish boys shook together in convulsions of fraternal mirth.

"Kraft was an active lad and for a while he clubbed the bull like a Tatar. Then *he* climbed a tree. Well, sheriff, that bull camped under that tree and pawed the ground and snorted fire up at Kraft. In half an hour, just sitting on a limb and looking down, Kraft caved in and shook like a hedge-sparrow watching a snake."

"Then," marvelled the sheriff, "the farmer came along and chased the bull away and paddled the both of you?"

"No," reflected Kirk; "nobody came."

He had turned serious and was tearing minute pieces from the corner of his letter.

"Then what did happen?" the sheriff was explosive with interest.

Kirk laughed in an embarrassed way.

"I'd about forgotten the last of it. When Kraft had about collapsed with his yelling, I got down myself and drove the red gentleman away."

"The heck you did!"

The sheriff planted his feet in a new position and braced both hands upon his knees.

"And then what?"

"Kraft got down and pulled himself together and streaked it for the nearest fence."

"The heck he did! And then what?"

Kirk poked his pencil through his letter; then spread the paper on his knee.

"Why, one of the old crowd writes me that Gus became a crook and fighter and is serving time in their state penitentiary for murder."

The telephone was ringing insistently, but the sheriff kept that prodigious trigger-finger upon the hook until he had heard the last word of Kirk's story.

"Serves him right," he pronounced, "for running. Hello—hello Dennison! Ain't you caught that bird yet?"

Conversation ensued, Prouty for the most part holding the receiver to his ear and making innumerable scrawls with a lead-pencil upon everything in reach. At length he hung up, took a pad of paper and struck two parallel lines across it.

"This line," he indicated, "is the river; and this one is the range of bluffs south of us. Our job is to watch the five passes leading through those bluffs to the river. Dennison says that Blake is hiding in the hills near Prince Brothers' ranch. Here is Prince Brothers'."

The ranch, which the sheriff indicated by a cross, lay some seventy miles southeast as the crow flies, at the angle of a great letter "L" formed by two roads, one leading west the other north toward the three most easterly passes, the farthest of which was thirty miles below Longvale.

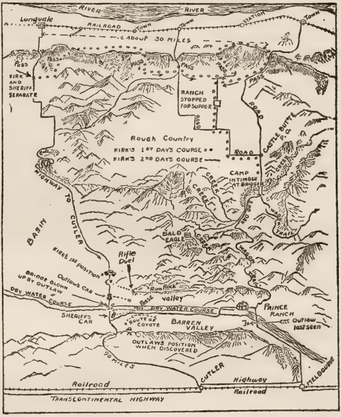
When the sheriff had completed a laborious sketch of the proposed action, thus ridding his mind of that torture, he sprang lightly to his feet, a great laughing whirlwind of human fallibility.

"So, you chased the red gentleman away, did you? Well, I'm for you! Stand up while I swear you in. I'll swear you for an even split on the honors. You take the north road to Prince's, I'll take the other. One of us is bound to meet the beggar. I'm going to give you Clem Ditmore. I'll take my old war-tank and three others. We'll meet at Prince's in the morning—pull the ends of the net together—as soon after daylight as possible. My regular deputy will take charge of picketing the passes."

They were ready to start by mid-afternoon. Main Street was agog, yet nothing short of armed invasion would remove the affair from the province of its funny-bone.

"Oh, you man-eaters!—Kirk, what you going to do with all that money? Oysters for the whole town!"

Kirk said nothing. He was experiencing the old sensation—the lust of the man-hunt.


RIVER
RIVER
Longvale
RAILROAD
TOWN
TOWN
TOWN
STATION
TOWN
About 30 MILES
Pass
Passo
PASS
PASS
PASS
PASS
KIRK AND SHERIFF SEPARATE
RANCH STOPPED FOR SUPPER
ROAD
ROAD
ROAD
CASTLE BUTTE P.O.
Rough Country
KIRK'S 1ST DAY'S COURSE
KIRK'S 2ND DAY'S COURSE
CAMP IN TIMBER AT BRIDGER
CREEK
CREEK
CREEK
CREEK
2ND DAY
WAGON TRAIL
WAGON TRAIL
HIGHWAY TO CUTLER
BASIN
BALD EAGLE
Rifle Duel
KIRK'S 1ST POSITION
BRIDGE BLOWN UP BY OUTLAW
OUTLAW'S CAR
DRY WATER COURSE
Rim Rock
Posse
valley
DRY WATER COURSE
PRINCE RANCH
Outlaw last seen
SHERIFF'S CAR
ROUTE OF COYOTE
BARREN VALLEY
OUTLAWS POSITION WHEN DISCOVERED
90 MILES
CUTLER
Highway
MELBOURNE
Railroad
Railroad
TRANSCONTINENTAL HIGHWAY

THE sheriff, who led in the get-away, stopped at the crest of the divide in the nearest pass ten miles south. Kirk came up and for an hour they speculated and swept with their glasses a vast cradle of plain, of butte and bluff laced with trail and road, peopled with sparse herds and pelted with the August sun.

"He's a clever dog," observed the sheriff, "but he don't know the country. Our best bet is to watch the roads nights and stir him up day-times."

Kirk was in high spirits in this fine new sport.

"Yes," he agreed, "the roads and the streams and the milk cows. Blake would insist on cream in his coffee."

"He won't go far to dodge a fight," put in one sage who, in an excess of zeal had cast several votes for Prouty. "He knows the game is up unless he can shoot his way through. Ha! Wouldn't the boys give us the laugh——"

Kirk had killed deers and a bear or so; but this pastime was tuned in a higher key.

"The joke of it is," he supplied, "we mustn't hurt the fellow."

"Oh, *hang* him," commented the sheriff; "don't take chances. Of course they *want* him alive, or at least without this talking machinery spoiled."

Ditmore chipped in.

"Does the reward come in large bills or in stock certificates? I sure need money."

"Four-fifths of the reward," Prouty explained, "don't apply at all unless Blake lives through the catching. Yes, no matter how many of *us* get *ours*. Burky is supposed to have had confederates in the Riverton bank murder.

"Kirk, you work east along the ridge. Weave in and out through all the passes till you get to Burdick's Gap, which is the last. That'll keep you in touch with developments till you strike south. You won't strike a 'phone till you get to Prince's. Stop every car you meet. If one of them is Blake, of course he gets the first shot; so flag 'em down early or—bust 'em."

They separated. At dusk Kirk had carried out the sheriff's directions and he and Clem were well into "enemy country." They had heard rumors but nothing which a good newspaper man would take seriously. They stopped for supper at a rundown ranch, the proprietor of which had just returned from an inland post-office called Castlebutte. There the outlaw was reported as driving a powerful car armored with boiler-iron; that he carried a vast quantity of supplies including a barrel of gasoline, that he was shooting on sight at everything he met, that he had not even washed his hands since the sanguinary encounter with the deputy at Melbourne, that he had caught and butchered a yearling calf at Prince brothers' that morning.

"Then his war paint is of a red color," observed Kirk.

He sat down on the level ground and smoked in a high fettle; he had never known the flavor of a pipe to be so rich.

Night gathered as they pursued their course. At Castlebutte Kirk refilled his gas tank and verified his bearings. Four miles farther south they camped at a small bridge, the forked roads which led to the different passes now having all converged into that arm of the "L" over which the fugitive must drive if he attempted an escape to the north.

An unfamiliar spot at night is but a pocket of darkness bounded by the uncertain limits of vision, and such was this. The pocket held a vague stuffing of tree-trunks and heavy bower; dark backgrounds and shadowed earth seemed to reach down and up to meet each other. The whole dusky prospect was shot with an enchanting lace of moonbeams.

Kirk and Ditmore lay on their blankets at the roadside facing the bridge and the dim mottled avenue which was the road approaching from the unknown beyond. They imagined eventualities and discussed a score of strategems. Sounds, it seemed, must carry for miles—the wings of restive birds thumping the leaves, eery whistles challenging the night peace.

It was a night to move one. Kirk pointed out with a kind of savage glee that, while a score of expectant men counted minutes in the north passes, the root and stem of all their expectations lay in that narrow bridge in the speckled moonlight. He told Ditmore how the story of his one-time friend had delighted and impressed the sheriff, how the tale had won them their chance at that favored post.

He improved the occasion to advise Clem how to know Burky Blake, in case they met the man. His appearance held nothing of the picturesque bandit; he was squat, of medium size, smooth face and roughly dressed—a rough, in fact, a low-brow and a braggart, an unfortunate and misguided man.

Naturally vicious and in his prime, he had by sheer quickness and cunning broken the custody of three officers at a U. P. transfer near Omaha in daylight, made a calculating dash for liberty and successfully run the gantlets of law and order across two States. A formidable man with a fondness for high sounding aliases. He had traveled under such names as Harry Thorn and "Yeasty" Montrose. Until he could change or wash his clothes, they would be profusely stained from his encounter with Andrews.

Three o'clock. For hours the sound of no motor had reached the listeners' ears. The moonlight was blending with a marvel of gray and the eager man-hunters pushed on to the south in the suppressed mood of dawn.

They crossed the unavailing bridge. The road now followed the stream and was scarcely less tortuous. There were sudden turns, new views bursting abruptly, rocky steeps, plunging descents, clumps of cottonwoods jutting like pieces of stage scenery and rock wedges which concealed everything beyond. Now and then they must stop and open a crude gate of barbed-wire. Kirk drove, his holster strapped on the steering column beneath his hand. Ditmore held his rifle cocked and thrust through the open windshield.

It was thus that they came to the headquarters of the Prince ranch, while it yet lacked an hour to sunrise.

They were drinking hot coffee by black cupfuls when a 'phone call came for Kirk. It was Prouty at Melbourne. He had been forced by car trouble to abandon his end of the plan, having gone straight across over the highway to Cutler, thence by train to Melbourne for repairs. Dennison, who awaited him at Cutler, had requested that Kirk secure a saddle horse at the ranch and dispatch Ditmore back in a northerly direction, instructing him to examine all trails carefully, then post himself on a certain high bluff commanding all southern approaches to Bald Eagle peak, a region offering every natural advantage for a siege, including water and meat.

Kirk was to traverse that arm of the "L" which the sheriff had last night abandoned, following it westward to its junction with the Cutler highway and there to await reinforcements, meantime intercepting two special deputies returning from a trip of communication with the picket parties north.

THIS course led through a valley of arrow-like straightness, open, parched and treeless between low bluff ranges the higher points of which were bizarre, ragged and capped at uniform heights by thick strata of rimrock. Large masses of this rock had plunged from their heights and lay in a thin and scattered rank throughout the valley.

It was the merest trail he followed along the flat dry water course. A June cloudburst had flayed virgin soil from large areas along this course, uncovering a subsoil of pure gravel whose yielding substance rendered impossible the passage of a car crosswise of that sun-pelted trough through the wilderness. The fugitive, therefore, must adhere to the hills on one side or the other or risk exposure at one of the established road crossings.

Here and there were fresh tracks, but the dry deposit of silt held no identifying imprint and they ran with an aggravating lack of purpose, or as if made by a traveler at night.

At intervals the road had been engulfed by the deluge, making slight detours necessary. Kirk conceived a probable trick in a fresh track which struck out across the open grass land. He searched with his glasses the flanking bluffs and alighted to examine the track on foot. He knew the indiscretion of this, since it revealed him to be alone. Yet he felt a savage cunning, a cunning at which he marvelled, remembering again the early influence of the man-killer—those boyhood game-stalking expeditions engineered by Gus Kraft. But, Kraft or not, savage instinct or not, he gloried in the warmth of it. In Ditmore he had had a strong ally; yet without Ditmore he felt his powers multiplied rather than diminished. He was alone: the chances he took, the success or failure that he met, were distinctly his own, and this thought stiffened him. There is the story of David and Goliath.

The Cutler highway was a smooth relief after the ninety arduous miles of the "L." Yet Kirk reached it with a sense of sickening disappointment.

Here the bluffs gave way somewhat, the valley spreading into a vast shallow basin with rolling and choppy margins. The two deputies came spinning down from the north in a fast roadster. They slowed to a cautious approach and kept him covered with a rifle until there was no doubting his identity.

"All the passes were air-tight all night," they reported; "so our game is still inside." Then after a moment's talk. "Are we to wait here with you?"

Kirk considered the rock-bristling wilderness before answering.

"No. Better hurry on to the railroad," he advised. "If you can catch Dennison before he leaves Cutler, I should think he ought to turn out two hundred men to beat the bushes."

He watched the two men disappear in a sharp crotch in the southern horizon three or four miles away, then took up a restless patrol of the highway.

At length, just over the rim of the rise to the north, he sidetracked his car in one of the grade gutters, climbed back to the crest and sat down on a gravelly knoll in an arc of the curving highway. From there he could overlook a vast stretch of territory in both directions. The water course, which still bisected the entire region, ran some forty rods below him at the lowest point of the basin. Its banks here were a foot or two high and sharp. The highway crossed it by a low wooden bridge with long, low, horizontal railings. There were no fences anywhere.

Under the sun and the reaction from his vigil, Mellon felt drowsy. Yet he knew the deception in that foreshortening atmosphere, knew that the blending contours might conceal objects surprizingly near at hand.

Yet over all the landscape he descried but a single movement. Dim and tantalizing at first, this proved to be a coyote nosing along the far side of the close-cropped valley. Its manner was absorbed and in harmony with solitude. As nearly as Kirk could determine, the animal was skulking along the trail of his car in what he judged to be a pure animal curiosity. Here was cunning again, savage cunning of instinct, differing from his own in that it was still pure and true to its primal breeding.

Yet, was it true to its breeding—a coyote on the trail of rubber tires! The curiosity which Kirk at the moment conceived, might have embraced other things—the hope of gleanings from camp refuse, the offal of the kill, the scent of freshly-spilled blood, even the scavenger's uncanny divination of death. Now and then it raised its nose with that plaintive upward thrust as if searching for a trace of taint in the air.

The animal was a mile away and Kirk hailed it only as a gifted and unconscious aid whose actions must instantly apprise him of any human presence in that distant quarter. In half an hour it had traversed about a mile and come slightly nearer. It became apparent, however, that the trail of Mellon's car was not its object, since it followed a course leading steadily upward to higher ground.

Its manner remained undisturbed, it was absorbed in some disquieting problem of its own; doubtless, Kirk thought, the half-cold trail of a rabbit. When, therefore, it was about to pass out of sight, he grinned and began an adjustment of his rifle sights. He made this an exceedingly nice operation, calculating the four elements of distance, wind, elevation and light. The roads remained empty of any vehicle.

Kirk fired five shots; and now indeed the coyote's actions proved the success of his sporting talents. It leaped and dodged in consternation and after the last shot, probably terrorized by the screams of glancing bullets beyond it, struck off in a panicky run directly toward Kirk.

Kirk sat still, chuckling happily and reloading.

To his own consternation and chagrin, the whir of a motor burst abruptly upon the air. Almost instantly, in the direct line of his fire, a car came reeling out of the contours, as if from the earth itself. Kirk ejaculated profanely, without knowing whether for folly or fortune. The car made toward the highway, lurched a moment in the gutter, then mounted the smooth crown and went roaring off to the south. It disappeared in the crotch whence the two deputies had gone an hour before.

Kirk was about to give chase with his own car when almost at once a black spot reappeared in the distant crotch. Some instinct or quick discernment told him that the same car had turned and was coming back. Its speed had increased if possible.

The road was visible for miles, dipping across the basin like a hammock swung from rim to rim. Another dark object popped through the notch. Kirk was already straining his vision to greet it—another car—and he snapped his fingers exultantly. He remembered his glasses. The two cars, a mile apart, struck the full sweeping descent of the highway. Their motors hummed, each in a mad key of its own; rolling yellow dust-plumes rising behind them, lengthened and swelled like growths of a witch's magic.

Kirk, planning by impulses, ran to his own machine and parked it dead across the highway. Encountering it thus suddenly the leading car must act with violence and confusion or suffer annihilation.

Kirk regained his lookout, however, in time to see quite another termination of the race. There was a brief snarl of planking as the pursued car swept across the bridge, followed at once by a long wail from its brakes. The driver leaped out before the vehicle had yet halted, ran back toward the bridge and hurled something with resolute vigor. Kirk saw the object in the air; it caught the sun's rays once, threw a silver flame of light and descended. The bridge lifted from its moorings, a bursting fan of dust and fragments.

EMELLON, in his concealment, was dazed—it was so like a pantomime, so long was the thin empty air in conveying the crashing explosion to his ears.

But he saw the truth; Blake had chosen a daylight concealment in close access to the bridge. Believing himself attacked he had attempted flight in more or less confusion toward Melbourne, whence, upon finding his escape definitely menaced, the cracksman had doubled his tracks, raced to the bridge and played his trump card with all the coolness and dispatch of a preconceived plan. Nitroglycerin, probably, had ruptured the highway and won him a clean pair of heels, so far as any expeditious interference from the south was concerned.

The pursuing car had skidded to a halt and its occupants came tumbling out a hundred yards beyond the gravel-ridden arroyo. Blake looked back from his car, waved his arms and laughed with his whole supple body. The newspapers had made much of that laugh; it was peculiarly his own and as it rang now in the wide basin it told much of the man's reckless fatalism.

His foot had touched the running board of his buzzing machine when Kirk saw the moment to strike. He rose and without warning other than the incisive clack of his rifle, planted a full clip of shots through the car's hood, or, to express the hunter's own thought: "behind the shoulder bone!"

The motor gasped and left its driver afoot.

The effect of Kirk's action was to complete the stupefied inertia of the man beyond the creek. The bandit, however, with no more than a circling glance, was prepared to act. The wild bulk of Bald Eagle peak was a clear picture on his right. Nearer by came an outthrusting spur of wasted bluffs, like a great jaw of broken teeth. He began pulling things out of the tonneau of the disabled vehicle. There was a flawless decision in his movements; he paused coolly to recover his hat which he knocked off in girding himself with a belt and with straps flung over his head. He waved this derisively and quickly turned his back upon the highway, a rifle clutched in his hand.

The sheriff's party—Kirk identified them as the dust of the blast cleared—began firing their pistols and following along the creek abreast of the outlaw. Kirk, with his spectator's advantage, could have screamed with delight at the drollery of the situation below—the valorous caution, the calculating silence of all, the criminal's sly glances from the posse to him, as if to determine the instant his purpose should be perceived.

Kirk saw this purpose. He let go a battle yell and began running.

"Hello, sheriff! It's me—*I*—Rain-in-the-Face! He's trying for the rimrock, sheriff. You hold the creek; I'll steer him on this side. If he won't give up, we'll have to wing him!"

The creek alone offered near-by cover. Prouty, already in virtual possession of it, shouted assent. Blake answered twice with his rifle and also broke into a leaden run, laughing as he did so. That laugh expressed his platform; he saw the determination of his assailants to take him alive. He would not be taken alive. The great basin was his arena; he had not yet decided whether his observers were to be gladiators also, or merely observers.

Kirk was on the rim of the arena, the last of the sheriff's party a full half-mile distant, the fugitive between them. The sun was warming, little sprays of dust clinging low to the earth marked the glance of pistol balls, the short calls of the deputies were bell-like. The thrusting jaw of bluffs offered a perfect means of escape toward Bald Eagle, precariously held by Ditmore. Kirk raced for the slope.

Blake was confident, but the crystal distances were deceiving to his eye and he had lost by a wide margin before perceiving it. Kirk's advantage had still gained him no protection when Blake took serious recourse to his rifle and it became a problem to avoid a nasty fire. The posse saw the value of his maneuver and called encouragement. They carried only pistols and as Blake turned his fire upon them they scurried like rats for the creek banks, seeming to vanish between two invisible lips in the face of the plain.

The lone man held a sense of humor—he howled in derision. He stood alone in the open, in perfect immunity, beyond the reach of any arm save Kirk's, and Kirk's distance momentarily increased.

Blake charged after him toward the bluffs in a clamor of shouting. Kirk passed from view round a lobe of the first bluff, emerging a moment later on its crest with an answering whoop. Blake still came on with a confidence which was unnerving, but by the time Kirk had expended another clip, aiming discreetly, the criminal, zigzagging artfully, flung himself prone and returned the fire.

The confusion of the moment was thus instantly molded into a battle of shape and symmetry. Kirk flattened himself and tingled with jubilance as his body felt the rock vibrate with the impact of shots striking ton blows upon it.

"Too low! Too low!" he scoffed at the top of his lungs. "I say, Burky, you're shooting wild!"

As his adversary relaxed to listen, Kirk saw the sidewise glint of his piece. Heads and shoulders of the posse appeared out of the glimmering basin, one of them shouting some laudatory nonsense to Kirk. The fugitive glanced back and swore at him cheerfully and painstakingly. Kirk recalled him with salubrious vituperation, using the glass to study his features.

"You can come closer, if you want, Mr. Blake. I'll wait for you."

Blake, however, chose to make the best of the position he held. His cover was scant enough, but while Kirk had an ample breastwork of rock, the outlaw was firing from behind a bulwark of five thousand dollars.

A shot shattered the rock higher up. The fugitive howled as Kirk ducked.

"How's that, Mr. Pussy-foot!"

"Better, but bad," returned the man who killed for the joy of it. "Come again!" and he added softly and with musical profanity, "Oh, mother, don't wake me up!"

Kirk trained his own piece and drew apprehensive glances from the desperado, both right and left, as the hot cones ripped long and sanguinary gashes in the sod beside him. As Kirk ceased this demonstration the outlaw sprang to his feet with a gleeful flourish.

"Who's wild now! Hoo, ha! Come and get me! You can't You haven't the guts! I'm no good to you dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

Kirk watched him whimsically. More shots brought him to the ground again, shielding his thick legs with the fear of a crippling wound. They exchanged fire again in alternation, by single shots, by magazinefuls, rapidly; then sat up and rested and reviled each other without anger.

The sheriff improved the truce to offer terms of surrender. The outlaw, in turn, offered terms to the sheriff. Kirk spent the interval with his gage screws and the delicate scales of the sight leaf. He looped the leather gun-sling clean around his body, as in target practise. The range was about five hundred yards—over a quarter of a mile.

The fugitive lay in the dish of an old buffalo wallow, shallow and sod-grown, its rim providing a rest for his rifle. It protected him from any closing-in attack, but from Kirk's somewhat commanding position its slope did no more than provide a slant for his body, so that hips and heels were shielded behind his head and shoulders—the parts which held the life that was worth much to others and nothing to him. His weapon was worthy of Kirk's own steel and there ensued a duel which the gods might have watched.

Kirk's target stood out nearly black on a field of parched gray grass. He increased the number of gashes in the earth near the outlaw. He could see them with his glasses—long parallel lacerations, as if the sod had been clawed by a monster trying its talons. Fast as he corrected his aim, he drew these closer in. Dust spurts marked his hits as plainly as paint on a wall.

The distance was great and Blake had no such aid. His shots struck clean rock, or cleft the air overhead, crackling in their passage with the unseen menace of lightning bolts. Kirk, like a superlatively good sport, cancelled the handicap. He coached his adversary incessantly and insistently, on the word of an expert and a gentleman.

"Didn't I tell you, Burky; you're plain careless. Your ratiocination is rotten. Your compliments go over my head—several feet."

Blake, in good spirit, took advantage of the aid and his work improved under the process—so much that Kirk's own nerves tingled. Yet he scoffed and shot the straighter. If the public's zeal for justice had rendered the bandit immune from death, a substantial rock served very well for the virtuous newspaper man. The posse climbed out of the creek and got their pipes to going. They saw the gladiators wholly intent upon each other. There was give and take, thrust and parry, taunts and jibes, the long-drawn screams of ricochets, the leap of dirt and curses, all the thrills of mortal combat.

"You're overshooting again, little soldier!"

"You lie, you lousy hyena!"

The low-brow in the man was coming to the fore.

"Listen for yourself; you can tell when

you miss a mountain, can't you? You've forgot to allow for the wind."

A breeze had risen.

"Liar! Trying to bum-steer me, you man-eating buzzard! Wind! You lie!"

Kirk felt resentment.

"Stick up your hat, little soldier; let's decide it. Put it up! Or if you like," he amended, "leave it on your head."

The outlaw took the challenge. However, he chose not his head but his gun and raised the hat on its muzzle.

It was a good mark—a black felt—and the light was good. At the fourth shot, Kirk had spun it twice; whereupon, amid the applause of the posse, the fugitive hauled it down. Kirk proffered his own headgear, insisting upon a return favor; but Blake only cursed with fervor and fired a salvo. The inaccuracy of his shots betrayed his temper.

Kirk put his cartridges in a pile and began a fusillade, dropping his shots with a steady and rhythmic precision. They gouged at the sod, bounded up bent or broken, each screaming with its own egregious shriek of torment.

When Kirk directed a stream of his steel emissaries above the outlaw's prone figure, he saw the figure flatten and cringe beneath their tumult. There was a moment when it seemed as if the wretched man would thrust up his head and stop one of those hissing pellets, thus ending it and avenging himself. But always the light blotch which was his face shrank below the line of fire and down again to the earth. There was a muffled cry of protest.

"Hey, *you!*"

Kirk did not laugh.

"Hold tight, old fellow, while I shoot the heels from your boots!" But he said this to himself.

The breech bolt seemed to work itself, swiftly, like a relentless shuttle. The sheriff might now have made a successful rush, but he only stood and watched while a streamer of dust formed and ran downwind from the besieged.

The hunter's lust had spent itself. Kirk was shaken and unnerved when another cry came—this time a shout of warning—and at the same instant, above the smoking rifle-stock, Kirk's target appeared disordered and in action. Blake rose, staggering in his hollow, hands lifted and empty. Now the sheriff ran in.

KIRK made the descent by leaps, but he was sucking solemnly at a blister on his thumb when he joined the others.

Blake was a figure of abject surrender, making an absurd mockery out of the drawn pistols of the posse. Red and white patterns from the dirt and sod were impressed upon his face. His lips were distorted and dripping, he breathed and cursed like a bad loser at the end of a Marathon.

The dish of the hollow was as a freshly tilled garden, save only where he had lain. His hat lay crushed on the ground, one of his boots was in truth nicked at the heel and the leather at the bulging calf was slit for inches. He was fouled with dust; dark, stiffened blotches of blood from the neck of Andrews defiled his garments—even the creatures of the wilderness had scented his sin.

"You'd flay a man, flay a man, flay a man—" he was only half-coherent, his glance ranging fitfully from one to the other of the curious faces.

"Happy thought, Burky Blake," observed the sheriff bluntly and without contempt; "you'll make a likely subject for the third degree—I'll say you will."

Kirk confronted his quarry a little winded. His face was a study and no triumph was in it.

"Sheriff," he addressed Prouty, "the law has been served; the prisoner is yours. Gentlemen, this man was a boyhood friend of mine—Gus Kraft. Gus, how are you?—you remember Kirk Mellon? I knew you the minute you left your car. I hated it, Gus, that's God's truth," Mellon laughed uncertainly. "That was a great run, Gus; your nerve has improved. Crawling rifle bullets are rather uglier than the mad eyes of a brass-mounted bull."

For once, and for the only time that day, the countenance of Gus Kraft, alias "Blake" alias "Montrose," turned almost innocent and boyish as he looked at Mellon and smiled.

"—— me! I thought there was something about you—yes I know you. I'd rather had it be you, Kirk. I could have surrendered to you in the first place—there always *was* a streak of —— in you!"

When subjected to the third degree, Gus Kraft talked again as the sheriff said he would.

IN THE RAIN

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by J. D Newsom

TANDA knew that he was a hero, he was quite sure of it, and everybody confirmed his own exalted opinion of himself. Even the governor at Nouméa, who had decorated him publicly and given him a stiff gubernatorial accolade, had assured him that he was unmistakably a hero. Not only the governor, but the local *gendarme* and the missionary had both praised him, shaken him by the hand and loudly acclaimed his valor.

This patronage in high places was balm to the soul of Tanda, and in his village his own kin looked upon him with such admiration that he dismissed with contempt all hints that he should again bend his back to labor. He was quite satisfied to sit on a stool—he disdained the bare ground—in front of the men's sleeping-house and recount at great length the marvels he had witnessed and the things he had done. He became a privileged *raconteur*, a spinner of tales, spending his days in idleness that at night he might delight the ears of his fellow creatures. In all New Caledonia there was none to compare with Tanda; he firmly believed it, and punctuated each sonorous sentence with:

"This is so, and the governor knowing all things said to the people at Nouméa—'Behold this man and laud him, for he is indeed a great hero!'"

But Pwajiri, who was the chief of Tevandui and a crafty old rascal, was disquieted by this worship, in fact he was much puzzled by the unfathomable ways of Providence. He had quite enough trouble dodging the payment of capitation taxes, which the *gendarme* was forever endeavoring to collect, and avoiding the hungry-eyed missionary who tried to entice him churchwards, without having to deal with a hero who disorganized the life of the tribe and set the young men dreaming when they should have been digging yams.

He kept his own counsel, however, until Martindale called on him to buy copra. Then while they squatted on the trader's schooner where no prying ears could overhear them, he let himself go.

He liked Martindale, who was quite unlike any other white man who had ever stopped at Tevandui. The trader was a big, bony man, very quiet, with a harsh, thin, immobile countenance and steady slate-gray eyes. Other traders slapped Pwajiri on the back and gypped him; this one kept his hands to himself and was comparatively honest—absolute honesty was impossible; the trader would have been ruined. Others tried to bully Pwajiri when they were not paying him a sort of buffoon's homage; this one treated him like a man and, their business done, they would sit together, smoking as they talked of other times and other places.

On this occasion Pwajiri had a request to make and he worked up to it in characteristic fashion—slowly, with a wealth of irrelevant detail.

The gist of his argument was that whatever gods there might be were making an

"*In the Rain,*" *copyright, 1923, by J. D. Newsom.*

utter fool of him. And Tanda was to blame. Tanda had always been a nuisance. In his youth he had been a petty thief, later he had stolen more valuable things—women, for instance. Every few days Pwajiri had been called upon to settle such disputes. Tanda nearly always scored a victory, for he was too big for any one man to chastise and he was so good-humored and handsome that everybody eventually forgave him. Also he was a convert to the missionary's faith and when things were really too hot for him he would seek shelter in the church where a judicious repetition of certain magical formulæ apparently caused his sins to vanish. Pwajiri could not understand such forbearance on the part of spiritual powers and was deeply skeptical, but he was helpless in the face of the priest's assurances.

Then an extraordinary thing happened. The *gendarme* had ridden across the hills through blinding rain to tell Pwajiri that the world was at war. He said a lot more about sacrifice and honor and patriotism, and Pwajiri had grinned. The white men, who put down inter-tribal warfare conducted for such legitimate purposes as head-hunting and ancestor worship, were fighting among themselves for the most futile reasons. Pwajiri had crowed and slapped his thighs until the official reached his peroration and asked the tribe to show its patriotism by sending three able-bodied men to join the contingent forming at Nouméa to go to the aid of the mother country. Pwajiri, thinking of his crops, had demurred until he remembered Tanda, then he acceded to the request with alacrity, found two other recruits—foreigners to the tribe, two wanderers of the sea from the Loyalty Islands, who had been resting at Tevandui—gave them all a highly colored rendering of the *gendarme's* speech and packed them off before they quite understood what was happening. War meant sudden death—Pwajiri had hoped for the best. Four years had gone by most pleasantly. Tanda must be dead; Tanda slipped from the thoughts of the tribe—then Tanda came home—a hero; a hero endorsed by that nebulous being, the governor. It was very grueling.

Pwajiri spat neatly over the schooner's rail. He was, he declared, a very old man who could no longer rule by strength alone. Twenty years earlier he would have broken a dozen Tandas across his knee, but today there were absurd restrictions to such just reprisals. He must adopt other methods and—he drew a deep breath—would Martindale help him?

The latter took his pipe from his mouth, puffed smoke-rings into the stagnant air and waited patiently.

Pwajiri chuckled to himself, spat, again missing the white woodwork by an inch, and went on to explain that some one was needed to counteract Tanda's depraving influence. Then, at long last, came the request: Would Martindale take Pwajiri's nephew and heir, Wandi, on board the schooner, show him the world, and make a man of him? The boy was quite smart for such a generation; he would make a good sailor. When he came back he would have tales to tell that would offset Tanda's noxious heroism.

"Where's the boy?" asked Martindale.

"Wait in village," said Pwajiri, stuffing his mouth full of trade tobacco. "Keep eye on Tanda."

"Fetch him. If he's all you say——"

With surprizing agility Pwajiri cleared the railing, dropped into his dug-out canoe and raced ashore. Within less than twenty minutes he was back again with Wandi, a stalwart, shiny-skinned Kanaka, chiefly conspicuous for his distended ear-lobes, which hung down on his shoulders, and his lack of clothing. He grinned all over his very ugly face when he caught sight of Martindale.

But Pwajiri's good humor had deserted him. He was in a roaring temper and seemed momentarily to have forgotten the fact that he was a "very old man." He raged up and down the deck shouting to the blue sky that he would disembowel Tanda and feed him to the pigs. Tanda, it appeared, had suddenly turned conspirator.

"What's trouble?" queried Martindale, resting peacefully in the shade of an awning, when the outburst died down.

"Tanda!" yelled Pwajiri, his short arms waving like a windmill. "He see Pilloi come. He go to him! Make fine talk. Go with him——"

From the outpouring Martindale gathered that one Firmin Pilloi, a dealer from Nouméa, had ridden across the ridge from the *gendarme's* house and had entered the village where Tanda had received him. They had laughed and chattered together without any reference to Pwajiri's existence and had sought a quiet spot on the hillside where they could talk without an audience.

And Monsieur Pilloi was no friend of the chief's. Formerly he had been given to treating Pwajiri as a senile imbecile with a passion for plug hats what time he evinced the greatest interest in the chief's household. He was tolerated now only because of the *gendarme's* marksmanship—but the village's copra went to Martindale.

"He come back," shouted Pwajiri for the hundredth time. "He make fine talk along Tanda! Pilloi—I catch him, you see. He——"

Martindale at last realized that the flow of uncomplimentary ejaculations might go on forever, for the Melanesian native when thoroughly roused is unable to express his feelings adequately unless he repeats himself over and over again.

"What's the harm?" he broke in. "Tanda's not much good. Let him go."

"Yah!" scornfully retorted Pwajiri. "Me chief. Me tell Pilloi no more trade-talk he get in Tevandui."

"Well, Tanda's got nothing to sell. He's safe enough. Forget it. I'll take Wandi."

The old man refused to be placated.

"Tanda," he declared, shaking his fist at the village, "Tanda want coat belong chief, savvy?"

Martindale nodded understandingly. Pwajiri whose right to the chieftainship had its roots in a remote past of myth and legend had been confirmed in his rank by an officious government. It had given him a medallion to wear around his neck and a blue coat with eight stripes of gold around each cuff. These were the proofs patent of his greatness. They gave him the privilege of calling on the *gendarme* for orders and the right to collect from his people the yearly capitation tax.

"Why do you believe this?" asked Martindale. "You say Tanda's a lazy ——. He ought to be quite happy doing nothing all day long."

"Huh!" grunted Pwajiri. "You savvy not much. He want coat. He want plenty women do work for him—need money."

Now, though Martindale was not over-interested in tribal broils, for he had other worries of his own, he did not want to lose Pwajiri's trade, which was steadily growing in volume, and he had no intention of allowing Pilloi in particular to recapture the local trade, so he remarked:

"Let's go ashore and find out about it. What do you say, Pwajiri?"

Then Wandi found his tongue and declared in a weird mixture of *bêche-la-mèr* French and corrupt English that nothing would please him better than to lay hands on Tanda and inflict upon him several forms of punishment, the least odious of which would be the cutting off of the hero's head.

"If that's the case," said Martindale, "I'm staying right here. I'm not going to get mixed up in a brawl just to suit you. And remember—" his drawling voice suddenly became commanding and his lank figure towered up—"and remember, you're signed on. Until you are paid off you'll do as I say. Understand that, Wandi?"

The native, taken back, nodded his head so violently that his ear-lobes danced loosely to and fro on his shoulders.

"Yassah," declared. "No fight—no fight."

"Is that right, Pwajiri? You're sure he's safe?"

"What I say," asserted the chief, "*he do.*"

"He do, do he?" murmured Martindale, a mournful look on his face. "Very well then, let's go. But you know," he added as an afterthought, "Pilloi is all right, I think."

A grunt answered him. Pwajiri was already over the rail groping for his canoe with his feet, and his face pressed against the schooner's side prevented any more adequate expression of his personal opinion.

They reached shallow water, splashed ashore and went quickly beneath the grateful shade of trees until they reached the village.

And there, sitting on his stool, quite alone, was Tanda!

He was a deep-chested Kanaka with extraordinarily long arms and thick, over-developed legs. He wore the remnants of a khaki uniform—a frayed, dirty tunic and a red sash which also did duty as a loin-cloth.

"Pilloi," snapped Pwajiri, "where is he?"

Tanda looked up at the chief and a flicker shot through his eyes.

"He came to greet me," he answered in the native dialect. "He was among the throng at Nouméa which heard the governor praise me, and he knows my worth. He is my very great friend."

"*Wah!* Have I not told you? He is

worse than a plague. Have you forgotten what he did to Paisi?"

"That was a sin," admitted Tanda, "but it is so no longer for he has done penance."

"Where is he?"

"Gone. But," he added slowly, weighing each word, "he brought a message for you. The *gendarme* says that you are to go to him today. He has orders to give you."

Pwajiri cursed fluently, calling down maledictions on the official's head until Martindale cut him short.

"You were wrong that time, Pwajiri. I'm going to get under way. Come on, Wandi. We'll be back this way in a couple of months or so."

Tanda, looking up with sudden interest, shuffled over to get a closer look at Martindale.

"You take Wandi?" he inquired, leering at the trader.

"Yes, he's coming with me."

The information seemed to amuse Tanda. He burst into shrieks of laughter and stamped his feet on the ground.

"That's fine—good!" he cackled. "You take him along. Big fellah not good here."

Martindale, his arms crossed behind his back, his head cocked on one side, gloomily surveyed the Kanaka.

"Glad to see him go, are you?"

The remark instantly sobered Tanda. He glared at the speaker.

"Yes," he snapped. "You too. You keep 'way. No come back."

Pwajiri's jaw dropped, he gaped in astonishment, and Wandi gathered himself ready to spring to Martindale's assistance, but the latter answered placidly:

"You're hunting trouble, Tanda. Some day you'll get it. But not now. I can't spare the time."

"No," sneered the native. "You all same Boche. Run 'way when Tanda come 'long."

"Perhaps so," admitted Martindale. "See you later, Pwajiri."

He turned on his heel and Wandi followed him toward the beach, a sorrowful, dejected Wandi very much ashamed of his new master.

THEY were out of the village before Pwajiri recovered from his surprize, then he turned upon Tanda and lashed him, but his words were without effect.

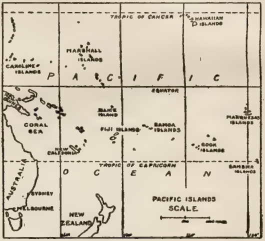
"I am a good Christian," said Tanda. "Your gods are little gods of no use to a man and your curses are wasted on such as I. Now you must come with me to the *gendarme's*."

"I know the way," snapped the old man. "Stay here on your stool if you can not work."

"I, too, have been summoned," grinned Tanda. "It is a matter affecting us both."

"And when we come back tonight, for your insolence, I shall have you beaten until the flesh on your back is pulp."

"I should report you and you would be fined," retorted Tanda. "A chief may do many things, but he can do nothing with fear in his heart. And you—" he spat it out between clenched teeth—"you are afraid of me. There is not a man in the whole village to come to your aid if I struck you and you would be dead before the fleetest boy could run from the gardens. There were three of you a moment ago to fight me, but you were all cowards, yes, even that white man feared me."



"I am too old to tear you down," admitted Pwajiri. "But be wary of that trader. When the time is ripe he will reach out for you and there will be an end to Tanda."

"Wah! You dream. Come, the *gendarme* is waiting."

The village lay in a hollow facing the sea. Behind it for a mile or more stretched a narrowing valley whose rich alluvial soil watered by sluggish streams yielded abundant crops. The needs of the people were limited to coconuts, yams and taros, and an occasional pig; most of the fertile soil was still covered by dense jungle-growth.

Pwajiri and Tanda passed by the open fields where the men and women bent at their work, threaded their way across the flat, marshy land and abruptly faced a gaunt hillside where grass grew only in withering clumps and a few scraggy pine-trees clung to the arid earth. Beyond the ridge, in the next valley, lived the *gendarme*, the missionary and half a dozen scattered planters on small estates. Once the people of Tevandui had been a great tribe whose villages were dotted over the whole district, but with the coming of the white man they had shrunken in upon themselves until they were now collected in the one village of thirty odd huts, many of them empty, their thatch roofs caving in, their doors covered by cobwebs.

Up the slope, higher and higher, they went—Pwajiri leading the way. The steep, narrow track clung to the brow of the hill. Beneath them at their feet lay the ocean, smooth and still in the heat of the day. As they climbed the valley dropped out of sight, there seemed to be nothing in all the world but the brown, parched hillside, the cloudless sky and the sparkling sea.

Near the summit Pwajiri, wiping the sweat from his eyes, paused to rest.

"I grow old," he panted. "In my youth there were no *gendarmes*, and all men came to me for orders."

Tanda, close behind him, smiled queerly and his eyes were veiled as he sullenly said:

"He will be angry if we are slow in coming. Let us hurry."

He watched the old man turn impatiently and again face the ascent; he noticed the leg muscles grow taut beneath the loose, wrinkled skin as they raised the heavy body—then he lunged. His hands closed about Pwajiri's ankles. He pulled, strained, lifted; his eyes bulged in their sockets, his face was convulsed, exulting. An exclamation of dismay came from the chief's lips; it changed to a cry of horror. He fell forward face down on the narrow track where he clawed and scratched.

Tanda, the breath whistling through his teeth, his back arched like that of a great cat, his feet planted wide apart, in one last, long heave raised Pwajiri from the ground and sent him spinning through space. Leaning back against the cliff he saw the old man hang motionless for a fraction of a second, as if suspended in the air—a black body with dangling limbs nailed against the blue sky.

Pwajiri fell screaming, struck a boulder far below, rebounded, rolled between two jagged rocks and lay still. The stones about him were dark with his blood; he moaned, stirred a little, quivered, and then stirred no more.

Tanda craned his neck as he peered to right and left. There was no sign of life on the desolate slope, and he went on his way shuffling contentedly through the dust. When the first houses of the settlement came into sight he began to run, crying in a shrill voice that Pwajiri was dead. At last he reached the *gendarmerie* and dashed through the gate only to draw up rigidly at the sight of Sergeant Rossard who sat by the stable door cleaning a rifle. Tanda saluted smartly and waited for leave to speak.

Rossard was a martinet, slight and wiry, fierce from the tips of his waxed mustaches to the toes of his regulation boots.

He looked up and snapped:

"*Eh bien?* I heard you yelling. One does not yell like that. You—a soldier—yelling. Surprized! What is it?"

Tanda stood at attention, his back stiff and straight, his hands close to his sides. He spoke in his orderly-room voice.

"This afternoon, *mon sergent*, Pwajiri, the chief of Tevandui, tripped and fell as he came over the Kumiara ridge. He was on his way to see you, *mon sergent*, to report on the presence of an undesirable trader.

"Pwajiri rolled from a great height and now lies dead where he fell, for I could not reach him.

"This I have to report."

"Yes, yes. Who sent you?" demanded Rossard, busy squinting down the barrel of his rifle.

"I was with him, *mon sergent*. He begged me to come with him, for he knew my standing as a soldier."

"Quite natural. Well, that rifle is clean. We must identify the body. Nuisance. Wait until I get ready."

Beneath his martial demeanor Sergeant Rossard hid the soul of a lawyer's clerk. His calligraphy was famous throughout the administrative offices of New Caledonia, his reports and his accounts were not only accurate but beautifully neat; his love of detail was infinite. Yet in this meticulous soul there was one little quirk—Rossard could not cope with any sudden change in his normal routine. Novel situations, unexpected crises found him unprepared, fretful; their prolongation demoralized him completely. He was apt under such circumstances to let events take care of themselves, to let things slide, or to adopt the first remedy, however inefficacious, that might be suggested by the most incompetent observer.

At first glance the accidental death of Pwajiri seemed to present no insurmountable difficulties until it suddenly became evident that there was no immediate hereditary successor available. The old chief was survived by two sons, but according to tribal law they were commoners with no claim to distinction. The real heir was Pwajiri's sister's son, Wandi. And Wandi was at sea, somewhere, with Martindale. He might be away months and months—years. In the mean time Tevandui would be without its tax collector.

For several days Rossard argued with the elders. Why would they not appoint one of the deceased's sons, he wanted to know. They sneered at him. Those two men, he was told, belonged to their mother's clan and had no more right to consideration than the flying fox from which they were said to be descended. Wandi, on the other hand, being an offspring of the great shark was the rightful successor.

The *gendarme* swore and bullied, spent long hours unraveling kinship tables to the sixth generation, only to find each and every one of his suggestions blocked by the elders who sat before him quite indifferent to the time they wasted. To them the affair was an important event in their existence; to Rossard it was a futile, unending wrangle.

He took his troubles one afternoon to the missionary who was secretly delighted to be thus brought into the discussion of temporal affairs.

"All these pagan customs," he said, stroking his black beard with a thin hand where blue veins stood out in thick cords, "they are a menace. We must put an end to them. We must destroy before we may build."

"That is easy to say, father, but how can it be done?"

"They are children—treat them as children. Be firm. It is for their own good. We must stamp out their traditions. Discipline——"

"Every man I suggest they reject!"

"Then choose a good man, a man with faith. Appoint him."

The *gendarme* grinned sheepishly.

"You know their—ah—their religious tendencies better than I do. Have you any suggestions?"

"There is Tanda. A strong man. A soldier. He was wild in his youth, but now he is——"

"C'est bien trouvé!" exclaimed the *gendarme*. "Tanda is just the man. I can handle him. He will make an excellent subordinate. And Monsieur Pilloi thinks well of him. Everybody will be pleased."

Everybody was, except the natives.

Within twenty-four hours Tanda was appointed chief. Before the assembled tribe he was presented with the badge of office and the gold-braided coat. Rossard made a short speech, truculently declared that if Wandi had taken any interest in the tribe he would not have gone away, and that all things considered the very best man had been selected for the office. Not a voice was raised in protest, but he mistook sullen astonishment for complete acquiescence. He rode back to his headquarters well pleased with the day's work.

As he went over the Kumiara ridge he noticed that the crevice where lay the body of Pwajiri was all aflutter with sea birds whose dissonant cries came up to him as they picked at the bones.

"I was clever," he thought. "Now I shall be able to collect the taxes more regularly. Tanda knows his place."

A week went by without any sign of impending trouble at Tevandui. People accepted Tanda without comment. He still sat before the men's sleeping-house while the other able-bodied folk spent their days in the fields. But his laugh grew more infrequent; he no longer told stories of battles in far-away lands. He brooded, his elbows on his knees, his eyes riveted on the ground. He waited.

Then the coastwise steamer came into the bay and from its hold were drawn case after case consigned to Tanda. The tribe stared and clucked, all work was abandoned while the new chief rent open crates and boxes. Unheard of marvels appeared before their eyes—a phonograph, a bed with a spring mattress, suits of wonderful clothes, shoes of leather, and most important of all, there was a house, a white man's house in sections all ready to be put together.

Tanda erected the bungalow in the very center of the village, gave concerts on the phonograph to the awestruck people, and again began to enjoy life.

"And who pays for these wonders?" asked one of the young men, jealous of so much wealth.

"These are gifts," Tanda said proudly, "made to me by a white man, by Monsieur Pilloi, who heard of my renown as a soldier."

"He asked for nothing?"

"Nothing, except that I put my name to a paper saying that I had accepted these things from him as a friend. This, he said, he would be proud to have and to keep. Of course he will buy our copra."

"But Pwajiri ordered that only the tall one with the face of wood——"

"Martindale? Those days are done. It is for me to order. And that is enough questioning. Listen while the music-box sings a great song."

He pretended to read the name on the disk, nodded knowingly and set the instrument in motion. His audience was duly impressed with his learning, but in truth it was limited to the use of four letters. Though he could sign his name—Tanda—he could neither read nor write. Of this fact, however, he was himself in complete ignorance. Having mastered the spelling of his name he imagined himself the possessor of all knowledge.

At this time his authority was questioned but once. He picked out a bride and, upsetting all precedents, demanded a dowry of her parents. The girl's father flew into a passion and told Tanda many obvious if unpleasant facts about his immediate ancestry and his right to the chieftainship. The man was strong and powerful and his wrath made him terrible, but Tanda sprang at him, brought him down, beat him until he was nothing but a bloody, screaming thing, and then dragged him over the hills to the police-station.

Sergeant Rossard sentenced the man to ten days jail.

The tribe, thereafter, accepted Tanda as an unavoidable evil. Many of the young men even admired him and were particularly careful in their church attendance hoping that if Tanda were to slip and die the missionary might have a good word to say for them.

FIRMIN PILLOI having paid a flying visit to Nouméa rode back to Tevandui accompanied by a burly half-breed, called Jean-Marie, and two pack-horses. Instead of going directly to the village, however, he called on Sergeant Rossard who greeted him with open arms.

"It is good to see you again," the official declared heartily. "Why this sudden interest in our poor district?"

"Ha!" said Pilloi. "You are going to see things! I shall wake you up, *mon brave.* I shall plant coffee and——"

"The valley is full. Who is selling out?"

"No one. That Kanaka chief, Tanda, has sold me his land—all of it, except an acre or so around the village. Here is the agreement."

Pilloi was a youngish man, prematurely bald, with blue eyes astride a thin, straight nose. He pronounced each word with such loving care that his utterances sometimes dragged, and he was always irritated when in conversation people finished his sentences for him.

"That's good," agreed Rossard. "You have seen the Colonial secretary, of course?"

"He was sympathetic," smiled Pilloi. "Most enthusiastic in fact. He told me to see you about the titles and other necessary documents. Tanda having been a soldier has full citizenship rights and may buy or sell——"

"Or sell anything he likes. I'll fix everything for you without any trouble. Only too glad to get new blood in the district. But," he paused doubtfully, "how are those Kanakas going to exist?"

"They can work for me. I shall even have to import more labor if all goes well. And as you know they just scratch the ground a bit when they want food, half the valley is nothing but jungle. If they don't want to work they can go into the hills. That is where they really belong.

"At all events, Tanda seemed quite agreeable to the deal. These people don't care where they live if only they have enough tobacco and a few yams. One place is as good as another to them."

"I'll keep them quiet," asserted the *gendarme.* "Tanda will do as he is told. He is the best chief I ever had."

"Jean-Marie is going to act as overseer," explained Pilloi. "As soon as I have settled him at Tevandui I am going back to Nouméa for supplies. You will see a great change in the locality before long. Roads—houses—a factory——"

He stayed that night with the *gendarme* and early the next morning crossed the Kumiara ridge. He passed group after group of natives plodding along the track to their fields and he waved friendly greetings to them. Their sullen nods annoyed him. He turned to Jean-Marie riding close beside him and said in a low voice:

"Do not forget. Handle these people with an iron rod. Bend them, break them. No loafing. They'll be ready to work when they begin to starve."

Later, on the outskirts of the village, he added:

"Tanda is going to be either easy or very difficult to handle. At all events do not trust him. He is dangerous."

The chief received them in the doorway of his bungalow to the strains of the Marseillaise played, so said the record, by the band of the Paris Municipal Guard. When the last note scratched away into silence, Pilloi remarked genially—

"Well, Tanda, I think it is time we talked business."

Tanda grinned and looked fondly at the gold braid on his tunic.

"There is no copra yet," he answered. "That foreigner, Martindale, took all there was."

"Not copra. That can wait. I want payment for all these things."

"But you gave them to me!"

"I did?" Pilloi gave a short, mirthless laugh. "A mistake on your part, Tanda. I gave you nothing. I sold you this house, that talking-machine, all this furniture. The price was reasonable."

Tanda looked dubious. He smiled nervously, fidgeted, smiled again.

"I have no money," he grumbled.

"It was never a question of money."

A cunning look came into the chief's eyes.

"You want something else. Yes? That will be easy now."

"It was never a question of money," repeated Pilloi, icily calm. "You sold me the land from the hills to the sea——"

A full hour went by before Tanda became convinced that this was not a white man's jest, but the heart-breaking truth. He was shown the paper he had signed, which was a quit-claim receipt for the land.

"But my people—how will they live? What can they do?" he wailed.

"Do? Work. They can grow all the yams they need around the village. No need to have gardens straggling all over the place." Pilloi winked. "And it's nothing to you—you'll have plenty of ready money——"

"The valley—from the hills to the sea for a house! *Wah!*" The savage blood boiled up in Tanda's brain. "I could crush you!"

He ground his teeth as he looked down the barrel of the revolver Pilloi had whipped from its holster. In the doorway stood Jean-Marie, a drawn weapon also in his hand.

"Are you going to make a fuss?" rapped Pilloi. "If so——"

"I want to see the *gendarme*. I must see Sergeant Rossard," begged Tanda, cowed by the guns.

"You do? If he agrees with me will you stick to your word?"

"I must see him," doggedly repeated Tanda.

"Very well, you shall see him. And listen," Pilloi went on soothingly, "your people are going to earn good money. The place will be prosperous. I shall build a store—no need to go across the hills for matches and tobacco."

Again his voice became threatening.

"That reminds me. Don't forget what I know, what I saw from the track over the Kumiara ridge. If you break our agreement I shall tell——"

Tanda stood motionless, silent, his hands clenched, his nails digging into his flesh while Pilloi gave his orders.

He was to place twenty men at the disposal of Jean-Marie to cut the bush. The overseer would run up his tent in the grove, yonder by the stream.

"That is where our elders worship," hazarded Tanda.

"*Allons donc!* You are a Christian. Not so much of that rubbish. You ought not to allow it," retorted Pilloi.

He saw to everything. Those trees must come down, that stream be channeled, that field plowed under, that track straightened.

"I shall be back in a few weeks," he told Jean-Marie. "By that time I shall expect to find everything in good shape."

Driving Tanda before him, he went again, late in the day, over the ridge to the *gendarmerie*. As they passed the spot where old Pwajiri's bones were bleaching, the native's eyes filled with tears which trickled down his cheeks and into his mouth. He spat them out, cursing, and the expression on his face, lighted by the rays of the sinking sun, would have astonished Pilloi had he beheld it.

Sergeant Rossard was curt and to the point.

Tanda had received his goods? He had signed a receipt for the land? What more did he want? The law was the law, a contract was a contract, and he must abide by the law and the contract. He was a citizen of a great nation with all the duties and obligations of a full-fledged elector. He was not a child. That was all there was to be said.

"I did not know all this," began Tanda.

His sullen countenance exasperated the *gendarme*.

"Then you should have tried to," he snapped. "You've been a soldier. You are not a child. And you should be the last man to complain. Monsieur Pilloi is going to clear all that jungle your people were too lazy to touch. He's going to make the place civilized. You ought to like that."

That night alone on the track Tanda sat for a long while brooding and still, and the sound of the sea pounding at the bar had the resonance of war-drums—not the thin rattle of the white man's drum but the rolling thunder of the tribal slit-gong.

When he went on down the slope to the village he seemed to have cast off the result of five years' training. His upright bearing was gone, he slipped along in absolute silence, round-shouldered, knees bent, a savage again.

In the distance he heard the mutter of the people's voices. They had returned at night-fall to find Jean-Marie's tent pitched in the sacred grove, but they were leaderless, listless, willing to submit if the gods of the grove refused to strike down the trespasser.

Tanda crossed the ford without sound and crept along the ground. He saw the half-breed sitting on his cot nervously fingering a revolver as he listened to the angry voices in the village.

An inch at a time Tanda crawled forward until he was within leaping distance. He waited patiently until Jean-Marie's gaze shifted from the tent-flap to the candle-flame where a swarm of insects droned, then he sprang. The light went out. There was a scuffle, a stifled scream, a gurgle, and the half-breed died with a knife in his throat.

Tanda went to the men's house where he found his people squatting about the smoking fire. He stood in the doorway listening to their growling voices. Ateya, the shriveled old magician, cursed him shrilly.

"The grove is empty," Tanda said at last, and in answer to the incredulous grumbles that greeted his words he flung at their feet the severed head of Jean-Marie. It rolled over, the glazed, dead eyes seeming to find fresh life in the light of the burning logs.

The monotony of peaceful years enforced by the laws of an alien race had robbed the tribesmen of their contempt for death. They stared at the blood bespattered thing and then at their chief who towered above them, half-seen through the reeking smoke.

Then he spoke. At first his voice was low and tense as he told them of the theft—how their fields had been taken from them, how they were to be turned over to a master to labor for wages. He told them of his own duplicity, his errors and his follies, but he did not mention Pwajiri.

His voice rose as he cursed Pilloi, the *gendarme* and all white men. He brought his people to their feet as he flung impassioned words at them.

Would they stand by and allow themselves to be turned from their fishing-grounds, driven from their fields? Would they meekly allow themselves to be deprived of the use of paths made by a hundred generations of great warriors?

He picked up the half-breed's head and shook it at them.

"This is a sign," he thundered, "and as I treated this one so can we treat all others. They are few in number over there, beyond the Kumiara ridge. Who follows?"

The magician, Ateya, alone remained unmoved.

"Surely they will kill us all?" he cried out. "This is useless. Now that that one is gone let us keep our fields and be still. The days of war are over."

"You do not understand," retorted Tanda. "Whatever we do the land is lost to us. It was never mine to give, but they have taken it. Let us take payment as we see fit and then—there are the hills where we still can hide and live."

The answering cry stilled all opposition. Tanda held them now in the hollow of his hand.

The stars overhead were paling and the sea was turning gray as the host swept out of the valley. Behind them, urging them on, the tremulous hands of old men were rediscovering long-forgotten cadences on the resonant skins of the war-drums.

NOUMÉA was ablaze with sputtering gas-jets. Over the gate of Government House a large, illuminated shield bearing the letters R. F. snorted and crackled in the breeze. The barracks had a line of fire running with military exactitude the whole length of the roof. The three big stores were decked out with a myriad little fan-shaped lights. In between these brilliant manifestations of joy, black and squat and ugly cowered the shanties of the Kanakas, the coolies and the half-castes who had celebrated the occasion by getting drunk early and going to bed since they were not allowed on the streets after sunset.

It was the Fourteenth of July, the Bastille had fallen one-hundred-and-thirty-odd years before, and the words "liberty, equality, fraternity," were now engraved on every public building, even as Montesquieu had preached in the wilderness.

The most elaborate of all these fiery dwellings was the town hall, facing the Square of the Coconut Trees. Here the gas-jets had been supplemented by the flags of all the allied and associated powers still on visiting terms with the French Republic, and Chinese lanterns were hung in odd and inaccessible places. Occasionally one of these lanterns caught fire and blazed with fierce determination until extinguished by the brass-helmeted *sapeurs-pompiers* who risked their lives scrambling along dangerous cornices that the guests of the municipal councilors might dance without fear of sudden death by burning.

Within the hall fifty couples went through the inelegant evolutions of a mazurka with the unleashed zeal of patriots. The more privileged onlookers, mostly ladies, sat on little gilded chairs ranged with mathematical precision around the hardwood floor. Behind them, crushed and hot and wilting, the late-comers stood on each other's feet or fought their way to the buffet in the aldermanic library where sweet champagne was being dispensed by a Government House lackey in knee-breeches.

In a corner, wedged behind the dais where sat the governor and his party, Martindale stood and groaned. He turned to his companion and murmured—

"Banningan, I'd like to give you the finest thrashing——"

"You won't," declared Banningan, a sunburned Australian living in New Caledonia for the good of his pocket-book. "You'll bless me. You've been introduced to his—his Excellency. You've made a splendid impression with your perfect manners and bad French. Next time you strike a snag all you have to do is go to him like a little man and he'll smooth things over. No bluffing—he's worth knowing."

Martindale grunted dubiously. Once upon a time he had been able to enter Nouméa harbor and transact his business without interference. Of late, however, petty troubles and exasperations had been accumulating fast. Officials demanded health certificates, clearance papers, customs declarations, not to mention harbor dues and demurrage charges. His expenses had more than trebled and constant delays were interfering with his trade. Usually two-hundred-ton schooners such as his were allowed to come and go without red-tape but in his case every by-law of the port was politely but rigidly enforced. He was helpless, there was no American consul at Nouméa, and he had almost decided to sever his connections with the island and deal only in the New Hebrides. He had mentioned his dilemma to Banningan and the latter had suggested that he meet the governor at once if not sooner.

Hence Martindale's presence in the heavily scented town hall ball-room.

"And," went on Banningan, "you should show more interest in this function. It's a popular outpouring of joy. I was brought up to believe that the voice of the people was the voice of God."

"In that case," retorted Martindale, "the voice of God is sometimes blasphemous, which is a contradiction in terms. Let's get out of here and breathe some fresh air."

They struggled out of the crowd and found chairs on a darkened balcony overlooking a small garden where sanded alleys twined between flower-beds.

"I must see that hardware merchant," Banningan said after a few quiet minutes.

"No time like this to get 'em to talk business. Don't mind if I leave you?"

"Go ahead," assented Martindale.

Soon afterward the sound of footsteps crunching on the graveled path reached him and beneath the balcony he heard Pilloi's voice chuckling:

"I have nearly finished *him*. He'll find Nouméa too hot before another month is past. I'll ruin him if he doesn't get out."

"I saw him speak to the governor," came the cautious voice of Pilloi's companion.

"Yes. I was standing close beside them all the time. The governor said to me afterward—he is an old fox that governor—he said to me—

" 'Ah, Pilloi, charming that American, *n'est ce pas?*'

" 'Martindale?' I said just like that. 'But yes, your Excellency, charming—and so energetic!'

" 'Indeed?' he said.

" 'Yes,' I told him, 'so energetic that we poor colonists will soon be going out of business all together.'

"The old man looked up at the ceiling and winked at the rafters. You know that trick of his—and I retired gracefully.

"Clever of me, eh?"

"A word in time—that is diplomatic, correct. We have been applying the regulations—" a short laugh—"it costs more than it brings in, but, *mon Dieu*, life is dull, it keeps one occupied. I've been at him for three days. Last time I went out to his schooner I thought he would pitch me over the side. Not at all though. Sad and calm as ever. He is going north tomorrow—if we let him go."

Pilloi whistled softly.

"He will be sadder than ever when he reaches Tevandui. Things are going ahead wonderfully well up there. The old chief is *finis*. The new one may be nasty, but that is of no importance. I've laid my hands on about seven hundred acres of really good land. Martindale is a stubborn fool but this ought to teach him not to meddle with better men's affairs."

A pause—a yawn.

"Well, let's go in that furnace again. That little Juliette Lacaze is adorable tonight. Pity her father——"

The voices drifted away, and Martindale allowed himself to sigh dismally as he uncurled his long legs and went back into the stifling ball-room. The matter might have ended there but for the fact that as he passed by the buffet Pilloi saw fit to accost him with every outward sign of pleased recognition.

He inquired after Martindale's health and the state of his affairs. He touched lightly upon his own business to mention its prosperous condition.

"A happy evening," he concluded. "It is a pleasure to see you at our little entertainment. In America, naturally, you have more sumptuous receptions, but this is a *grande famille*, so friendly, so——"

"If you've got a family," said Martindale, sadly shaking his head, "I suggest that you stay close to it."

"*Monsieur* dares to insinuate—" flared Pilloi, his pleasant temper deserting him.

"He means to insinuate that he overheard you when you were talking in the garden. He means to insinuate that he's going up to Tevandui to have a good look-see. And he means to insinuate that if he meets you somewhere not too crowded he'll talk in the one honest language you seem to understand. Is his meaning clear?"

All this was drawled in Martindale's customary unhurried voice. Pilloi saw no cause for alarm. He was irritated not a little, but quite self-possessed surrounded as he was by friends. He surveyed Martindale, a slight smile playing on his lips.

"I do not know what you heard," he remarked, "but you will be well advised to be very careful. And as to Tevandui, *mon cher monsieur*, I now own the place. Trespassing is forbidden."

In the ball-room the orchestra was playing a polka not quite twenty years out of date, and the buffet was all but deserted.

"One of my crew," Martindale went on placidly, "is a boy by the name of Wandi. He is Pwajiri's nephew and, I believe, his successor. Tanda's not fit even to look after himself. He's a lazy ruffian——"

"Sergeant Rossard is the best judge of that," retorted Pilloi. "If you have any complaints to make, make them to him. And if you have this Wandi on your schooner, keep him there or—drown him, but do not take him back to Tevandui. You might find it inconvenient."

"Thanks for the hint, but I am going. And—you seem to have been pretty busy up that way, tell me: How did Pwajiri die so suddenly?"

Pilloi went white with anger.

"How dare you!" he spluttered.

"Perfectly natural question," murmured Martindale. "Was it measles or influenza—or did Tanda help him——"

Pilloi's overstrained nerves gave way and in a sudden gust of uncontrollable temper he slapped his white cotton glove full across Martindale's mouth. Having done so he was conscious of immense relief, a great pleasure at having struck the man whose stolidity irritated him so much. And all the time, at the back of his mind overlayed by the needs of immediate physical action, a whispering voice told him that he was afraid, agonizingly afraid of the gaunt, silent American who made no move and stood looking down at him with unblinking slate-gray eyes.

The situation became unbearable. People had whirled around at the sound of the blow and now stood rooted to the ground in rigid, unnatural attitudes. The man-servant behind the refreshment table gazed with foolish parted lips, while the bottle which he held in his hand spilled its contents all over the floor.

The fear in Pilloi's heart grew and grew. He felt sick and ashamed.

"I don't know what made me do such a thing," he stammered. "The heat——"

"I know," said Martindale, his lips hardly moving, "and you are coming out in the cool with me."

He laid a bony hand on Pilloi's shoulder and the latter sprang backward, snarling.

A fat, little man, some one with authority, with a purple rosette in his button-hole, bustled forward importantly.

"Now, now, *messieurs, je vous en prie!* Let us be calm. An affair of honor. To be settled honorably. But let us be calm."

Onlookers, as if hypnotized, repeated the words—

"Let us be calm."

Through the doorway all at once rushed an excited, overheated councilor, wringing his hands as he strode around the room like some wound-up mechanical toy.

"Such terrible news!" he wailed. "The governor has ordered the dance to cease at once in sign of mourning. It is terrible. Unheard of—for years. Poor Rossard—poor Father Truche! Both dead! And Gallois, Patin, Damier, all dead. Frightful!"

"What a calamity," squealed the fat, little man. "But I beg you, let us be calm; what has happened?"

"Oh, it is terrible! The Tevandui tribe, so quiet, so civilized—they have rebelled. A massacre! Only Gaston Monnard has escaped. The telegraph wires were cut. Poor Monnard rode fifty kilometers to Bourail. The news has just come through. That poor Father Truche! They cut off his head and stuck it on the church roof before setting it on fire.

"But the governor is sending up a detachment with machine-guns. It will be *foudroyant!* A lesson for those black dogs."

He paced up and down until he came face to face with Pilloi, then he added in a flat, unemotional voice:

"Oh, Pilloi, the governor sent me to find you. His Excellency's compliments and will you go to him immediately. You have interests at Tevandui, I believe?"

The affair of honor receded into the remote past. The fat, little man was carried away in the rush that followed the councilor's hysterical utterances. For a second Pilloi stood glaring at Martindale.

"I can not wait," he snapped. "I must go at once. I am needed. A mission perhaps! You—later!"

He snapped his fingers.

"We shall settle this. Do not think it can be forgotten."

His tone conveyed the impression that he was the injured party, that he had been struck across the mouth with a white cotton glove.

Martindale's eyes looked through him, Martindale's voice reached him above the growing hubbub.

"I promise—I won't forget."

Pilloi moved his shoulders impatiently as if to shake off the American's presence and, wrathfully, because he could find no retort, dashed away to find his liege-lord, the governor.

In a few short minutes he passed from the matter-of-fact position of a hard-working business man to one of importance and responsibility. Because of his knowledge of the Tevandui valley he found himself mobilized, ordered to resume his rank of first lieutenant of colonial infantry, and detailed to accompany the punitive expedition.

Pilloi got gloriously drunk that night for purely sentimental reasons and was carried toward dawn to his house where he lay on his bed repelling the attacks of savage hordes led by a blood-thirsty Martindale. He slew them all and slept.

By noon time he was uniformed, sober, and stood on the bridge of the rusty-sided freighter requisitioned to take the troops northward, saluting and smiling at the cheering crowds gathered on the quay. It was a clear, cool, delightful Winter day.

Martindale watched the emotional leave-takings from the deck of his schooner anchored in the road-way. Ever and again his fingers went to his face where they rubbed gently across his lips in an unconscious effort to remove the feel of Pilloi's white cotton glove.

Beside him stood Wandi shuffling uneasily.

"*Bawss*," he pleaded, "old man gone dead. You make for Tevandui? You make for Tevandui, *bawss?* Oh, *bawss*——"

"That's all right," said Martindale. "There's no great hurry just yet."

But there was. He might have grown old in Nouméa harbor and his schooner fallen to pieces had he not resorted to Draconian methods to break down the passive resistance of a somnolent bureaucracy.

He battled for three days to obtain a health certificate for his crew, only to find that his clearance papers had vanished down some obscure pigeon-hole. The futile search lasted another four days before a new set of documents could be made out. Overheated officials begged him to be composed and tranquil. He remained composed and tranquil, but he visited the port officer early one morning and informed him that papers or no papers he would leave that afternoon. The functionary's temper sizzled up. Banging a ruler on his desk he ordered the trader to be gone. The trader held his ground. His tranquility and composure were in themselves so offensive that the official, in a state of amnesia induced by suppressed rage, brought down his ruler on the bony hand resting on the counter.

When his sanity returned he found himself being dragged by the coat collar across a wide, sunny street toward the colonial secretary's office. His ankles and heels bumped painfully up two stone steps, across a polished floor, through a doorway and he was dumped at the feet of his chief.

Martindale spoke long and lugubriously. He was still calm and tranquil and the great man, who was not without a sense of the ridiculous, tried to hide a smile behind a pained expression. The American with his glittering eyes and determined manners pleased him. He looked at his subordinate on the floor and only suppressed a thick chuckle by exclaiming:

"Ah, *monsieur*, with this affair at Tevandui, we are all so upset! You must not be too hard on us. I am afraid we are not accustomed to such——"

"Perhaps not," admitted Martindale, "but I'm in a hurry. I want to get to Tevandui myself."

"You should not adopt such energetic methods, but—sit down. You shall have the papers this evening. I give you my word."

He issued orders, soothed the maddened port officer, and smiled upon Martindale when he had cleared his office.

"So you are going north? It is a heartbreaking affair. So many good lives lost—and nothing accomplished."

"No?"

The secretary went on to explain that the tribe was showing an unknown cunning, never coming out into the open to face the machine-guns, picking off a man here, a man there, swooping down at night upon outposts, hiding by day in the hills.

"Listen," said Martindale. "I think I can help. May I try? I don't want to butt in, but I'm losing trade."

"What have you to suggest?"

Martindale told him. Within an hour he had his papers; before nightfall his schooner was standing out to sea; three days later he sighted the gaunt outline of the Kumiara ridge thrusting like a prow into the sea.

But he did not stop at Tevandui. Some ten miles to the north Wandi took the wheel and guided the schooner through a narrow pass into a deep, still creek where in former times war-canoes had sought shelter.

RAIN—for days on end out of a leaden sky. The river flooding its banks had trickled through the valley, leveling the earth beneath its thick, muddy waters where the bullfrogs chorused in the lamentable night. The air was steaming and rank, fetid, heavy with the smell of wet, charred wood and decaying matter. Here and there above the even brown waste, bushes emerged vividly green, loathsome as a disease.

The rain fell steadily, slowly, riddling the surface of the water with innumerable, tiny pock-marks, and the echo of this incessant patter filled the valley with a dreary, monotonous sound.

A warm breath of wind occasionally sighed down the valley, barely ruffling the livid ooze, drifting away through the deluge toward the unseen hills.

The sea was flat and mute and gray, beaten into silence, heaving oppressed beneath the deluge.

Crowning this desolation, heightening its intensity, on a knoll by the sea rose the gaunt, black, glistening walls that had once been the home of Sergeant Rossard. In the courtyard, by the wall, beneath a slimy hummock lay the victims of Tanda's wrath. Above the mound there were eighteen crosses and these, finding no purchase in the liquefying soil, were slowly giving way, tilting awkwardly, stiffly, like so many rigid supplicants paying homage to the soil that would engulf them.

The gate swinging on its one remaining hinge creaked and creaked, an inch each way, very slowly—shrill and piercing as it swayed outward, low and grinding as it swung to.

Firmin Pilloi winced at each long-drawn wail. He lay on his cot beneath the sodden canvas tent and tried to blot out the sound with the thought of his physical suffering. His pinched face was yellow and his slightly parted lips were weak and twitching with pain and fear. Malaria. His teeth bit down on his lower lip as he stifled the gurgle of anguish that came from his throat with each exhalation.

Beyond the raised tent-flap he could see the end of the burial-mound and by the gate, stolidly indifferent to its rasping tune, stood a sentry leaning dejectedly on his rifle, his black face expressionless, his dull eyes gazing out through the veil of water into space. Over his shoulder he had flung an old jute sack all smeared with muddy streaks.

When the strain became past bearing Pilloi called out between set teeth:

"Close that —— gate, —— you. Close it tight!"

The sentry staring vacantly at the sound of the voice, slopped from his shelter of corrugated iron and fumbled with the iron catch.

The creaking ceased and the soft patter of drops on the taut canvas swallowed all other sounds.

Pilloi felt intolerably lonely, and he found his loneliness more terrible than the fever. A week before, the leader of the expedition, Captain Ribou, had gone off into the hills leaving him behind with ten men to mount guard over the supplies and to keep the tribesmen out of the valley.

At first Tanda had used his training with careful cunning—cut and run, the stab in the dark, a stray bullet whining by, an odd man chopped down without noise twenty yards from the camp. Never a rush across the open, never a chance for the machine-guns. Just stealth, cunning and brutal death. This was not warfare, but murder.

Then came the rain.

"They'll stay in the hills," Captain Ribou had argued. "I shall go after them. Surprize for surprize. I'll cut in behind them. Their women must be somewhere. And when I find them! *Brrrr*—a couple of belts from the guns and we can go home. But he is a *fameux lapin*, this Tanda. Wait until I catch *him*."

He had gone, and Pilloi his body tormented by fever had watched and seen the crosses give way, listened and heard the rattling rain, prayed and found no relief. Sometimes a runner struggled back with tales of hardship, of sudden, vicious encounters in gorges full of deceptive shadows. One day no runner came, but the next morning Pilloi found two ears bound to a stone lying before his tent. He had kicked the thing out of sight beneath his cot. It was there now, somewhere.

The gray day gave way reluctantly to black night. The sentry was changed. Pilloi heard the inarticulate sound of his men's voices coming from the shelter they had erected in the gutted stables. The native corporal appeared, droned his report, vanished.

Pilloi's orderly brought soup and soggy bread, green with mold. Should he close the flap? They wrangled. The white man weak and irritable, undecided, the black one stolid, indifferent, his face blank and expressionless. Never having suffered he disdained pain and looked upon his master's petulance as a sign of weakness. He went away at last leaving the flap half-open and its end hanging limp and straight made a channel for more rain to trickle in beneath the cot.

The atmosphere in the tent became suffocating. Pilloi lay too exhausted to move, grunting now with each breath he took. It seemed to bring him physical relief, giving him an outlet for his crushing depression.

He quivered with annoyance when above the sound of his groans, above the steady monotone of the rain, he heard once more the shrill creak of the gate. Some fool had unlatched it! He listened to the dismal complaint of the hinge. First the thin screech—a pause—then the rasping sob, on and on and on—

Pilloi struggled into a sitting position, opened his mouth to shout, but his tongue clung to the roof of his mouth, his throat contracted and his back where the shirt clung damply was suddenly cold and tingling.

A hand had been thrust beneath the tent-flap and was fumbling at the catches.

He watched, fascinated, spellbound, impersonally wondering whether the groping thumb would find the eyelet.

It did; the flap was being raised.

Pilloi yelled, yelled again, tried to snatch his revolver off the chair by the cot. The black hand was over his mouth; his eyes rolled up and grew sick with fear, for he looked full into Tanda's distorted face.

As if he were lifting a child the Kanaka threw him over his shoulder, ducked out of the tent and was gone, leaping in great bounds down the waterlogged road. By the gate lay the sentry with his throat slit wide open.

Behind Tanda rifles crackled, sounding hollowly through the darkness, and a machine-gun began its mechanical *tap-tap-tap*, pouring lead fanwise up and down the valley.

Each time Tanda heard the bullets coming toward him he fell flat in the mire and sheltered behind Pilloi's limp body. The latter's terror gave way to numbed indifference.

He pleaded—

"What have I done to you?"

"You?" laughed Tanda, half-speaking to himself. "To please you I killed old Pwajiri—and you tricked me. We have no home. More than half my people are dead. You hear that machine-gun? We heard others two days ago. Yes—they found us, they swept us where we hid——"

Pilloi whimpered while the bullets ripped by a foot overhead.

"From end to end of the gully," Tanda went on, "a stream of lead through the rain. What chance had we? I made them lie flat to the ground behind the corpses of their kin and at night we fled. But I knew where to find you—cowering behind walls, you weakling. And now—" he raised himself to his knees and pulled up Pilloi after him— "and now before we are finished we shall watch your slow death. See if you can die as my people died when your time comes."

Slowly the machine-gun was swiveling around. Its hissing bullets smashed into a clump of near-by trees, passed on scuttering in the shallow water.

Tanda set off, trotting easily, head to the rain.

Morning found them out of the valley, up among the clouds.

"Now you can walk," said the native.

But Pilloi collapsed. His head was bursting, each breath he drew tore through him until he longed to breathe no more. He lay at his captor's feet, his knees doubled up beneath his chin, his fingers clawing at his chest.

"Sick," Tanda grunted contemptuously, "sick——"

Roughly he slung him across his back and went on. Up and down, up and down through a maze of gullies and over mist-shrouded hills until at last, slipping and sliding down a rocky slope, he came to the tribe's hiding-place—a cluster of trees and thick undergrowth in a marshy valley bottom.

Tanda came through the break in the trees, halted, stared and the greeting he had ready died on his lips.

His people, the remnants of his people, were huddled there awaiting him and in their midst stood Wandi and the trader, Martindale, Pwajiri's friend!

"You have let these men come among you—and live?" he said slowly, unbelievingly. "You have taken back Wandi who fled when you were in distress."

"I did not," flung back Wandi. "I have come back for I am the real chief, and I say there has been enough bloodshed."

"He—" Tanda pointed at Martindale— "he brought you back and he is like the others.

"Oh," he shouted at the silent ring of warriors, "why did you let him live?"

"Because," answered one, "he was trusted by Pwajiri in those days when there was peace—and food."

"And Pwajiri," added Wandi, "was not

the man to slip on the Kumiara ridge. Did he slip, Tanda—did his feet betray him?"

"By the way," Martindale suddenly drawled, his even voice cutting sharply above the guttural roll of the native words, "just put down that man, Tanda. He's—why it's Pilloi!"

Tanda dropped his captive from his shoulder. Pilloi lay motionless where he fell. Pilloi was dead.

Then Tanda raged. He begged, he beseeched, he implored. His voice rang beneath the trees. Were they going to surrender to their pitiless foes, were they going to be wiped out without a fight?

"This trader has made a promise," interposed Wandi. "He will get back our land for us if you will follow me."

"He lies," snarled Tanda. "He is no more than a spy, and Wandi has sold his soul to such as he."

Martindale though he could not understand the words sensed the doubts in the minds of the natives.

"That's enough," he said. "It is all settled. It was decided before you came back. I shall go to meet the soldiers and make terms."

He stood with his arms folded behind his back, his head slightly bent on one side. His whole bearing was easy and unafraid.

"You shall not go," Tanda whispered, "for I shall——"

Like lightning he leaped for the white's man's throat, but the latter swayed just an inch out of reach. Tanda stumbled and a blow between the eyes sent him staggering back. He became a tearing whirlwind, mad, bestial, primitive, roaring as he tried to lay hold of his prey.

At first Martindale gave ground though each time his fist shot out it found its mark. When Tanda slackened for want of breath he found himself crushed beneath a hail of blows. Weakened by his all-night journey, battered until his eyes were closed, sickened by the desertion of his people, he slipped at last in the churned-up mud and lay still.

He had found his master and no longer wanted to live. Dully, he told himself that for him there was no surrender. Even if he were pardoned he could not face the monotony of the old life. He recalled in a flash the towns of France—ships, roaring trains, streets crowded with friendly people who smiled at him, tall houses— And he was on his face in the mud with the rain rattling on the leaves of trees.

He looked up vacantly.

"Why do you not kill me?"

"Not my work," said Martindale.

"You do not kill me," repeated Tanda.

He called to the gaping men and women—

"It is your wish to surrender?"

They muttered their assent and he staggered to his feet. Perhaps, he thought, if he told them everything, if he omitted no detail, they might kill him.

He shouted at them:

"Wandi is right. Pwajiri did not slip going over the Kumiara ridge. I slew him! I threw him down on to the rocks because Pilloi promised to give me all the things I wanted if I did so. All that he asked in return was our trade. And then he came demanding our land in payment."

He bayed at Wandi:

"Do you hear? I killed Pwajiri. What will you do now?"

"The white men make the laws," said Wandi. "Let them judge you."

And Tanda stood alone and apart, a stranger among his own people.

Through the drizzling rain, faintly echoing, drifted the sound of distant rifle-fire.

"They're not far off now," said Martindale. "I must go and stop them or——"

"You come back, *bawss?*" pleaded Wandi.

"You bet your life," asserted Martindale, "I want to see you settled at Tevandui making good copra again. You'll have to hustle to make up for this."

He came upon the soldiers three valleys away, strung out from hilltop to hilltop, firing as they advanced.

"I do not trust these Kanakas," said Captain Ribou. "I can not trust them. I shall await them here for one hour, then I shall go forward. They must be prepared to suffer whatever punishment I think fit."

"I'm not a soldier," Martindale sighed his heartfelt thankfulness, "and I don't want to interfere, but here's a letter from the colonial secretary. He's agreed to let 'em go back to their village. You see, Pilloi is dead and Tanda——"

The officer threw up his hands in despair when he heard the whole story, exclaiming:

"*Monsieur* should have been a diplomat. My compliments. You should have come earlier. To think that Pilloi——"

"I'm going to send one man on ahead,"

said Martindale. "I don't think Tanda wants to surrender. He knows what's awaiting him. Give him a decent send-off."

An hour later as the rain thickened to a steady downpour Tanda marched across the ridge into the valley. In his hands he carried a rifle.

He came within sight of the expectant troops and advanced solitary and defiant through the knee-high brambles.

A voice called out—

"Will you surrender?"

And again—

"Tanda, for the last time, will you surrender?"

For answer he raised his rifle to his shoulder.

Slow and deliberate a machine-gun began its harsh death-rattle.

The rifle fell from Tanda's hands; for a space he faced the stream of lead until all at once, as if broken in two at the waist, he doubled up and pitched over, toppling sidewise into a muddy pool.

The swarm of bullets sung clear above his body and clacked viciously through the bushes beyond. Then the machine-gun ceased fire.

When Tanda's rifle was examined it was found to be unloaded.

LETTERS FROM A TRAMP—AT SEA

by Frederick Campbell

I WAS coming off watch at four A.M., when up comes one of the lascar seamen, and says Nevison's gone crazy. He's our third, you know—picked him up in Glasgow.

However, it didn't seem any business of mine, dog-tired as I was, to do any alienist's work, so I went ahead and turned in.

I'd been asleep about half an hour, when I was wakened by the light being switched on, and there stood Nevison, absolutely rolling squiffy. Being half-awake, I didn't notice his condition at first, so when he called me a ——, of course I hopped out of the bunk and caught him an awful belt on the jaw, which is why my writing looks so funny—dislocated my little finger.

He picked himself out of the washstand, and then instead of coming at me, he busted out of the room and slung his hook for the deck, howling that he was going to commit suicide. Harris came out of his room at the end of the passage, and I suppose Nevison thought he was going to try to stop him; anyhow, he smacked Harris' head against the door-post, and if he hadn't stumbled over the hurricane sill he'd have been over the side before I could have reached him. As it was, he did a spread-eagle on the deck, and I covered him like a piece of blotting-paper. His head walloped the deck, I guess, because he went right out, and didn't come to for pretty nigh half an hour, during which time I sat by his bunk, cursing like a fool and propping my eyes open with my fingers. He hadn't even anything to read in his room, except Norie and a copy of Sandford and Merton.

By the time he opened his eyes, I was mad enough to have crowned him again but I didn't.

"You're a nice guy," I said, "shipping as an able-bodied third mate, and going dippy the second night out."

"It was the neuralgia," he said, "and the whisky I took for it."

"Have you got any more," I said, thinking he might be a blessing in disguise; but he said no, he never carried it, because it always affected him like this.

"Well, who gave it to you?" I asked, knowing Harris to be tight as a drum.

"Everybody had turned in," says Nevison, "but I found a bottle in one of these rooms. I was in such pain I drank pretty near the whole bottle."

Well, I'd thought I'd had enough trouble for one night, with three-quarters of an hour's sleep gone to ——, and a busted finger, and both shins barked; but no—of course, it had to be my whisky he'd found——

THE THREE PALLADINS

CONCLUSION

by Harold Lamb

Author of "The Road of the Giants," "An Edge to a Sword," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

"YOUR birth-star, ill-fated one, betokens success to you. Therefore the emperor has decreed your death."

So spoke the Servant of Mercy; but Mingan, Prince of Cathay, threw off the silken cord the executioner had cast over his head, and escaped in a light, hunting-chariot.

At the Western Gate of China's Great Wall he was held until the emperor—bound for the great annual hunt—arrived. Him Mingan pleased by aptly answering questions concerning the history of Cathay and was given permission to ride on ahead of the royal cavalcade.

And so, still seeking to escape from the sinister power of Chung-hi, the emperor's son, Mingan rode on. Making the acquaintance of a young Mongol, Temujin by name, he joined that man and rode in pursuit of a band of Taidjut horse-thieves. Coming up with the Taidjuts, they regained the horses, killing several of the thieves.

They were now joined by Burta—daughter of the khan of the Gipsies—and the three rode cautiously through the cordon of the hunt until, after many days, they came to Temujin's tent-village.

Temujin's father had died and the young warrior was now Khan of the Horde, but most of the khans, not wishing to be ruled by a stripling, refused to give him their allegiance.

Jamuka, Master of Plotting, warned Temujin against Prester John.

"He is your foe," he said, "because he desires to be master of the Horde."

The years passed. Of the five Mongol khans who had remained faithful, three died. Temujin's herds were thinned, and the horses disappeared—apparently stolen by the reindeer people.

"Instead of many enemies," said Mingan, "you have but one. His messengers have taken the guise of other tribesmen. Who can tell his name?"

"At the feast of the desert tribesmen we will make him uncover," answered Temujin.

And then a messenger arrived from Burta warning Temujin not to come to the feast.

"They will kill you," said the messenger, whose name was Chepe Noyon, the Tiger Lord.

He was a Kerait, owing allegiance to Prester John, and was something of a dandy, a singer of songs, and a mighty fighter.

Notwithstanding Burta's warning, Temujin decided to go to Podu's feast. To Mingan and Chepe Noyon he gave gold tablets, making them Palladins of the Mongol fellowship.

"Wherever you go," he said, "you will be honored. You are to command a *tuman* of ten thousand warriors. Are you content? Good. Then do you both choose a hundred to follow you, our swiftest horses, our strongest wrestlers. We ride to Podu's feast."

AT THE games Mingan's shrewd counsel as to the racing of horses enabled Temujin to win a heavy wager from Podu. But in the other contests—the javelin cast, the arrow test, and wrestling, Temujin's representatives met defeat.

And then a red-headed stranger, a visitor from the frozen north, one of the reindeer tribesmen, entered the contests. He was a big man—men called him *Subotai*, the Buffalo—stolid, and had the strength of a giant. He came to grips with the champion wrestler of the Tatars and would have killed him had not Temujin interfered.

"I will take you for my khan," Subotai said to Temujin. "Your men obey you when you speak."

And now Mingan, knowing that Temujin wished to have news of Burta, made his way under the cover of darkness to the Gipsy tents. He discovered that Burta was kept a prisoner and overheard two men—one wore the skin of a bear over his head and shoulders—plotting to kill Temujin.

Returning to the khan's pavilion, Mingan witnessed a mighty wrestling bout between Temujin and a newcomer—a Turk.

"The Three Palladins," copyright, 1923, by Harold Lamb.

The end came when Temujin caught his opponent by the legs and whirled him through the air. The Turk's head thudded against the pole of the pavilion—his skull was shattered.

"A good match," roared one, but Temujin was deaf to the acclamations and picking up the dagger the Turk had carried—contrary to the rules—demanded—

"Whose dagger is this?"

"It is Mingan's," answered the Master of Plotting.

"He is a snake," said Podu vindictively.

"Aye," Mingan admitted. "It is mine. I dropped it within the hour. But the wrestler was no man of mine."

Sheer surprize kept Temujin silent for a while. At last he roused himself.

"Guard Mingan, Subotai," he ordered, "and let no man leave the pavilion until the Mongols pass out."

With Mingan under the cloud of suspicion, Subotai and Chepe Noyon rallied to him, and that night the three heroes cemented their friendship.

In the night the pavilion of Temujin was attacked by a large force led by the man in the bear skin, and Temujin owed his life to the mighty fight waged by his three palladins.

Mingan was badly wounded and left in the care of Burta.

After many days their hiding-place was discovered by Jamuka, the Master of Plotting, who boasted that Prester John was his ally and that he would become the Master of the Horde. He buried Mingan in the sand, leaving only his head exposed, and rode away, taking Burta with him.

Mingan was rescued from death by the arrival of Chepe Noyon, who had been sent by Temujin—Genghis Khan, he now called himself—to bring Mingan and Burta to him.

"We, too, will go to the land of Prester John," said Mingan. "There we will find Burta and see behind the mask of our enemy who goes about in the skin of a bear."

And so, after many weary days of perilous travel across the burning sands of the Gobi, they came to the domain of the magician—Prester John.

VIII

THE MAGI

"WHO are ye to attempt the forbidden? Nay, by Allah, stand back! It was said to us that this should not be, and on our heads is the care of the black stair! Dogs! *Caphars*—unbelievers, children of evil impulses—stand back!"

The company of Jelairs had been forced to line up on the lowest steps of the granite stairway leading up to the castle, because as soon as dawn lightened the sky, the women and children of Tangut thronged to the plaza at the head of the lake as if by a common impulse. They pressed against the archers, pleading with outstretched hands for word to be sent up to Prester John in the castle of the peril that was closing in on them.

"King John!" they cried. "Let the anointed of God comfort us! Let us see his face that has been hidden from us for years—let us see his armor and his sword that we may be comforted."

The archers drew their short falchions and thrust back the people vigorously, using the hilt at first, then the flat of the blades. A Kerait captain remonstrated with the Jelairs when more than one of their blows drew blood from the women, asking if word of the latest tidings had been sent up to the castle, and offering to go himself to see that this were done.

"Is not Jamuka Khan the leader of your army?" retorted the archers. "Does he not wear the bear's head? It was his command that no one be admitted to the stair until he came. Stand back!"

Mingan, standing near the edge of the lake within ear-shot of the plaza, caught Chepe Noyon by the arm.

"Did I not say there was treachery and trickery to be dealt with?" he whispered. "We must lose no time in gaining the castle. If you make known your name, would the Keraits support you in an attempt to overthrow these Jelairs?"

By way of answer Chepe Noyon shook his head and pointed to the throngs in the streets facing the plaza. Most of the armed men were Turkish tribesmen; the Christians of Tangut had been sent out to meet Jamuka. The older citizens were without arms; in fact they seemed to be a peaceable folk. When all efforts to penetrate the line of archers failed, they drew back and fell to gazing up at the castle and talking among themselves.

The Christians were taller than the average of the desert tribesmen, and lighter of skin.

Mingan looked up at the tiers of white houses set in green gardens—a fair city, mistress of sunshine and fertile fields. The water of the blue lake was fresh and clear. The sky overhead was smiling—white flecks of clouds passing over the forested summits of the hills. But on either hand the heights fell away when they reached the end of the valley, so that the hill of the castle was in reality a separate mountain and the only feasible ascent was by the stair.

"Then will we play a trick," observed the Cathayan. "Come!"

He turned back to the *serai*, the Tiger following; and led out the ponies without saddling them. Making sure that no one from the streets of the city was watching, he crossed the road and sought the stream by the bridge. There he urged his pony into the water until the animal was dripping from head to tail; Chepe Noyon did likewise. Once out of the water, the ponies were permitted to roll in the dust by the road, whereupon Mingan sprang to the back of his animal and forced it into a gallop, the Tiger following, and the dog Mukuli bringing up the rear, barking.

They swept past the *serai* and up into the streets where Mingan continued to flog his horse with the whip.

"Way for the messengers from the north!" he cried as he encountered the throng by the lake.

People turned to look, and a lane was opened to the steps of the plaza. Here the two riders dismounted and hurried to the line of archers, where the captain of the company barred their way insolently.

"What tidings bring ye?" he demanded.

"Our word is for the castle," said Mingan curtly. "Will you halt a courier from Jamuka Khan, and taste the bastinado?"

The leader of the archers scowled, glanced at the wet and dusty ponies, at the bedraggled attire of the two strangers, and fingering his beard, said:

"Scant time have ye had, to ride to Tangut from the battle. I am in command of the Jelairs in the city. Speak, therefore to me, but softly, so that these dogs shall not hear."

Chepe Noyon thrust forward, having heard one or two of the watchers in the throng saying dubiously that the two riders had been seen about the *serais* the last evening. But the Turk had no ears for the townspeople after the Tiger spoke a few words.

"Fool and son of a fool! We come from Jamuka, not from the army." He took his cue from Mingan, and lowered his voice. "We have orders for those who guard Jamuka's woman within the castle—she who was taken from the Gipsy camp and brought hither for the khan himself."

The captain's face changed. He had heard of Burta and knew that this was a matter where meddling might lose him his head.

"A token?" he grumbled. "Surely ye were given a token, minstrel."

Chepe Noyon nodded and drew from his wallet the gold tablet given him by Genghis Khan. The Turk made a pretense of reading the Mongol script that was strange to his eyes, but the sheen and heft of the gold spoke volumes. He returned it with a bow and ordered his men to make passage for the messengers.

"But, good sir," he added thoughtfully, "take heed of the watchers at the gate of the castle, for they are not as polite as I."

He turned to beat back some young girls who would have run to the steps after Mingan and Chepe Noyon.

The dog, Mukuli, however, writhed and scampered through the array of the archers legs and made after his master. Thousands of eyes watched the two strangers ascend the stair to the first turn, where they were lost to sight behind the screen of the forest.

For a thousand feet the granite steps led up, zig-zagging across the face of the hill where the ascent was steep, so that the two *orkhons* were unable to glimpse the castle even when they had climbed to the level of the sides of the valley. But presently they came to a landing of black marble, guarded on either hand by a jade lion, one clutching a shepherd's crook, the other a cross.

From here the stair ran up almost sheer, and Mingan saw at its summit the dark line of the castle wall. Against the wall a figure moved and the sun glinted upon an object that darted down, whistling past his head. A javelin, hurled from above, splintered to fragments on the marble.

Chepe Noyon held up his hand with a warning cry.

"A truce. We are——"

He leaped aside just in time to escape being impaled by a second dart, and threw himself over the railing of the stair into the brush, followed by Mingan. Another missile hurtled through the growth over their heads, and they crawled, perforce, into the shelter of the nearest fir-trees that screened them effectively.

"Now, by the horses of ——" swore the Tiger, "that was a wanton act!"

Manifestly, they could not ascend the last, almost vertical flight of the black stair, in the face of such opposition. Nor would it be feasible to descend for help to the archers of the plaza. By now the men-at-arms would have had time to talk things over with the townspeople who had seen them the evening before, and would know that they had not arrived in Tangut that morning as they claimed.

"We will climb through the forest growth," decided Mingan, "and have a look at these custodians of the gate."

It was not easy. The hillside here was almost a precipice and often they were obliged to help each other up over rock-ridges and to crawl upon masses of boulders beset by thorns. The earth mold under the stunted trees that clung to the slope was treacherous, and more than once they slid back, starting a miniature avalanche of stones down the heights. Thereafter they circled such danger spots and braced themselves against the boles of the trees.

By necessity they gave the watchers at the gate a good inkling of what they were about, and when—Mukuli being ordered to sit passive behind them—they crawled into the network of juniper and flowering jasmine at the summit, they beheld two men armed each with a sheaf of javelins standing at the gate of the wall that opened out upon a small landing at the stairhead. And all thought of overtures vanished.

The two guards were negroes, massive of build, wearing the broad turbans of the southern Turks. Moreover, after watching for a while, Mingan was satisfied that they were mutes. Although he and the Tiger lay passive until they ached, the guards did not cease to peer in their direction. Signing to his companion, he crawled back cautiously to where the dog awaited them, out of sight of the gate.

"They are Jamuka's men," snarled Chepe Noyon, little pleased with the part he was compelled to play. "Has Jamuka made a captive of the king of the Keraits? If we had between us a weapon——"

"We have not," Mingan pointed out.

"If we may not enter the gate, we must climb the wall, if we are to have an audience with your king."

With a nod of assent the Tiger led the way to the base of the wall and began to circle it, heading away from the entrance. Here there were no tall trees, and passage through the brush was difficult. The wall was some fifteen feet, and at no place did they come upon an opening or postern door. So at length the Tiger halted, to rub at the scars left on face and hands by the brambles, and to stare up hopelessly at a clump of slender birches, that offered no convenient limb, spanning the space to the wall, although growing within a dozen feet of it.

"This is a river I can not cross," he muttered. "See, the sun is near its zenith, and we are no closer to the castle. Nay, stare not at that wand of a tree. We have no ax to fell it, to make it serve as a ladder."

"Nevertheless, it will serve us."

Mingan surveyed the clump of birches and selected one of the largest—one that tapered up some thirty feet, and leaned a little toward the wall.

"But it will not help us back, once we are over. If you are not afraid——"

"Act," grunted Chepe Noyon.

So Mingan began to climb, pulling himself up the bole rather than trust to the slender branches of the white birch. For some distance the tree was large enough to support his weight without bending. As he worked higher it commenced to teeter. Mingan paused, gathered himself together and went swiftly up the tapering stem—clutched it as high as he could reach, and, as it bent, swung his feet clear.

The tip of the birch swung down with a rush, bearing Mingan with it, and as it leaned toward the wall, descended in that direction. There was a rustle of leaves, a crackling of wood, and Chepe Noyon watched him disappear over the wall, releasing his hold as he did so.

The birch whipped back, although now it leaned more toward the wall. Chepe Noyon lost no time in following his friend's example; but he took Mukuli under one arm, and, encumbered by the dog, descended heavily on the wall, let go the birch-tip and rolled off. Mingan, standing in the soft earth underneath, held out his arms instinctively and the two men, the dog and the lute thumped on the ground in a heap.

Mukuli began to growl at once, and Chepe Noyon rolled off Mingan, propped himself up on an elbow, gulped air back into his lungs and froze into immobility. Mingan started to rise, and thought better of it.

A spear's length away crouched a full-grown leopard, its tawny eyes malevolent, its tail twitching.

[illegible] MUKULI, between the two men, saw bristling defiance, and the more the dog growled the louder the leopard snarled.

Slowly Chepe Noyon reached out and took up the lute, the only available weapon, and more slowly he rose to his feet. The leopard ceased to breathe defiance at the dog and centered its attention on the man.

"A wise man," observed Mingan, "will strike the strings of a lute before he hits out with the butt."

Chepe Noyon considered the crouching animal and decided that it was more startled than angry. They could not, however, go forward without arriving at a better understanding with the four-footed guardian of the wall. Smiling skeptically, he placed the cord of the hand-violin over his neck and ran his fingers over the strings. Whereat the leopard gave a hideous snarl.

"He likes not the instrument, perhaps the voice is more pleasing," commented Mingan judiciously.

The Tiger began to sing, in his pleasant, guttural voice, an ode of the land of the Tang, and they saw that now the great cat relaxed its muscles and stood up, its claws drawing back into sheaths. And then out from the cypresses that hemmed them in, walked a small bear, limping with one leg.

The bear considered them awhile, sniffed at Mukuli and began to nose about indifferently in the lush grass. Chepe Noyon went on singing and along a path through the brush trotted a powerful mastiff with a scar running from jowls to belly.

"A potent minstrel, you," remarked Mingan, picking up Mukuli who was trembling with excitement, "for here are three surly beasts who yet offer us no harm. Sing on, but let us go forward to the castle."

The path led, to their right, to a pond where among water-lilies swans floated about a stone island and a wooden kiosk. A bridge ran to the islet, but they could see no one moving in the garden-house, so turned to the left. Mingan noticed that the mastiff and the bear fell in behind them, while the leopard was to be seen flitting among the cypresses first on one side then on the other.

They passed through the wood to a series of grassy terraces where a flock of sheep grazed, and flower beds set with iris, and thyme ringed round the black bulk of the castle. Suddenly Mingan looked up.

"Strangers! Who are ye? Whence come ye? What seek ye?"

It was a shrill cry from directly over their heads. Brilliant in the clear sunshine of the mountain top, a bird with green and blue and red feathers fluttered.

Chepe Noyon stayed his song.

"We are two wanderers from the desert with tidings, O Winged Talker. In peace we seek Prester John."

"Who are ye? Whence come ye?"

The birds circled their heads, and there was no doubt that it uttered the words. Then, rising, it flew toward the tower of the castle, and its cry became fainter—

"Strangers—in the garden of Prester John."

The two warriors looked at each other in silence. They had not the least doubt that they were in the abode of a magician. Birds that talked—wild beasts as tame as fireside cats—doubtless the castle sheltered greater wonders. They went over the sheep meadows more slowly, and, looking back, Mingan saw that the bear passed the flock with only a casual glance and, more remarkable, the sheep took no heed of the bear.

Chepe Noyon had said that in the place of Prester John was peace, and here, surely, was evidence of it—among the animals. There was something in the garden that was not to be found in all Cathay and the Gobi—so Mingan reasoned. What of Burta? No human being was visible, even the mutes at the gate being hidden by the line of cypresses that stretched from the castle to the wall.

"Come," said the Tiger, shouldering his lute.

THE hall of the castle was empty, although two candles burned at a table set below the dais at the upper end. From the walls hung tapestries wherein were worked stories unfamiliar to Mingan—an army on the march, and one that puzzled him, a stable over which a rayed star pictured above a woman with a child who sat in the midst of cattle and sheep.

On the table between the candles were gold vessels bearing food, and covers for three.

As the two warriors entered the hall, Mingan fancied that a figure slipped out of sight at one side of the dais. Here a curtain of heavy silk stained with age covered the wall at the end of the hall, and near the curtain a door led them into a side corridor from which stairs ran up the castle tower.

They climbed the steps, seeing dusty armor and spears here and there by embrasures, but no sign of the man who had vanished from their sight. On the tower summit they were able to overlook all the gardens of Tangut, the wall, and the valley of the city. They saw the two mutes standing in the open gate at the head of the stair and the tiny forms of the bear and the leopard moving about on the terrace.

But no other living object. While Chepe Noyon gazed at the dust wreaths on the plain that were horsemen moving in toward the city, Mingan was intent on the panorama of mountain peaks rising to the west, to far snow summits.

"The Roof of the World,"* explained the Tiger, "whence it is said that Prester John came to this land. See yonder, in the east, riders draw in to Tangut—messengers from the armies, or perhaps the first of the fleeing. Our time is short; before nightfall must we find the daughter of Podu, and speak with the master of the castle, ere Tangut is ringed in iron and flame."

Chepe Noyon spoke under his breath. True, he could see no sign of the lord of the castle. Yet the table was set and—a magician who could talk through birds might well be invisible to mortal eyes.

"O minstrels, Prester John of Asia gives ye greeting and would welcome ye at table."

The warriors beheld a boy at the head of the stairs, who bowed and motioned for them to follow him. Chepe Noyon's teeth clinked together spasmodically, but Mingan who seldom lost his presence of mind, followed the page down to the corridor and into the hall.

A glance showed him that incense was burning now in front of the curtain. At the table, attended by another youth, and by the great mastiff, sat a tall man who did not look up at their coming. He lifted a hand in greeting and Chepe Noyon knelt, while Mingan, harking back to his days at the court of Cathay, made the triple obeisance of respect.

Respect, assuredly, was due the alert brown face, the white beard of the aged king, who wore instead of a crown a cap of cloth-of-gold peaked in the front and the back, and a wide-sleeved robe with a red cape across the shoulders. A shepherd's crook stood beside his chair.

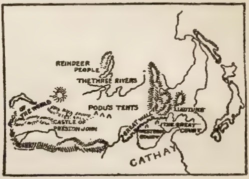
On one shoulder perched the parrot, which straightway began its warning—

"Strangers, in the garden——"

"Peace, chatterer—" Prester John signed to two chairs at the table—"it is long since men have come to my hall with tidings of the valley and the plain. This is the day the Star will be over Tangut. So doubly welcome are ye who come from the desert. Eat, therefore, and rest ye."

He nodded to the attendants, who brought basins and towels and washed the hands of the wanderers, thereafter setting food before them.

"Few abide in the castle," went on the king, "for those who served me aforetime have been called down into the city, and the warders at the wall are men-at-arms unknown to me." He stretched out a hand and placed it on the broad head of the mastiff. "Yet have I warders three who sleep not, and leave me not. My pages say that ye wear the garb of minstrels, O my guests. How came ye into the castle?"



Chepe Noyon for once was silent, so Mingan related how they climbed the wall and appeased the leopard. He studied the thin face of the old man, who never looked up or moved in his seat. Prester John's words were those of one who was accustomed to command, and despite his courtesy he seemed troubled. Now however he smiled a little and lifted his eyes.

"Well did you, minstrel, when you turned your hand to music, not to a blow. The leopard is restless, and is pleased with my harp and voice, when I beguile him so. The bear and this warrior—" he touched the dog again—"are gentle. Aforetime I healed a wound in his chest made by a boar's tusk, and made whole the broken leg of the bear that was caught in a trap near the castle. They have grown up under my hand."

Mingan knew now what he had suspected at first, that Prester John was blind.

He finished a light meal in silence, sharing the suspense that held Chepe Noyon voiceless. The king ate a little fruit and drank some wine, feeding the while pieces of bread to the mastiff.

---

* The Himalayas.

"Where is the maiden who sought sanctuary in the castle yesterday?" he asked one of the youths.

"O sire, it is not known to us."

A frown crossed the forehead of the blind man.

"In the night I heard her voice at a distance. By old usage she should have shelter in the castle, for that was the law of the first Presbyter—sanctuary, even to the beasts of the field. Of late, however, my people have not come up from the city, that I should sit in judgment." He turned to the warriors. "Some men of Jamuka, who is absent on the border, brought into the gate yesterday a woman from the desert who awaits the return of Jamuka near the castle. Have you seen her?"

"Nay," said Chepe Noyon, uneasily.

"She was brought hither against her will," added Mingan quietly. "A captive."

Prester John turned sightless eyes on the Cathayan as if to probe into the truth of his words.

"The maiden herself can tell us her case, O minstrel."

Signing to one of the boys, he ordered them to search for Burta, the Gipsy, and bring her to him.

"Until then I would hear a song, or a tale. Yet, first would I know the names of my guests."

"O my king," said the Tiger, "I am Chepe Noyon, of Tangut."

"Who wandered from our land, seeking adventure." Prester John smiled a little. "Did you find it, O youthful Tiger?"

"Aye," put in Mingan steadily, "in the camp of Genghis Khan, the master of the desert. And I, too, am a companion of the khan—Mingan, once prince of Liao-tung in Cathay. Now, sire, a wanderer, seeking justice for—a maid. I have the gift of reading men's faces and I know that here at your hand will I find justice for Burta, and the unveiling of treachery."

The Christian king lifted his hand.

"You speak boldly, O prince of Cathay. What treachery?"

"Among my people it is said that a crooked trumpet will not make harmony, and a lie rings falsely in the ear. There is time—" he glanced up at the sunbeams that came in through the embrasures high overhead—"for naught but truth between us, and our lives—mine and the Tiger's—are pledges of this truth. I will tell you a tale, as you in your bounty, gave permission. Then will it be for you to judge what the treachery is."

Prester John considered.

"Begin, and omit naught, my guest."

So it happened that Mingan related to the king of the Christians how he had joined the Horde of the desert, and how Genghis Khan had made himself master of the Horde, and had come to war with Jamuka. He told of the death of Podu and the capture of Burta. Earnestly and swiftly he spoke, ending his tale with the arrival in the city, and sparing mention of the battle.

When he had done, Chepe Noyon, encouraged by the silence of the blind man, added excitedly:

"O sire, deal with me as you will, but know that you have enemies in Tangut. Turks guard the stair leading to the castle, and others the gate. Tidings are kept from your ears—the messengers from Genghis Khan to you were slain. The people call to you from below, and are struck down by Jamuka's men——"

Mingan laid a hand on his arm, but the young warrior shook him off.

"O my king, it is said in Tangut that you are able to cast a spell on your foes. Arise, don the armor that in the time of my father's father you were wont to wear among your people, the Christians of Asia! Slay, with your art of magic, the false Turks who hold your gate, and go down to those who cry to you for aid——"

"My son," Prester John stood up and the two warriors rose, "I am blind, and so was I born."

"But you have lived for twelve times a hundred years!"

The old king shook his head.

"My son, you have lived afar from the castle and have listened to idle tales. I have no more than three score years and ten, nor am I a worker of magic, save that beasts are gentle under my hand, and that I seek to serve the Cross."

With the assured step of one who knows his surroundings, he moved to the curtain and drew it aside, disclosing an altar of white marble, where on a spotless cloth, stood a gold cross.

Letting fall the curtain, the blind man knelt a moment on the step of the dais in prayer. When he rose it was with new decision.

"By the voices of men, O Cathayan, I know the speakers of truth, as you read their faces. Harken, therefore, ye two, to the tale of the glory of the first of my line, and the shame that is mine.

"TWELVE hundred years ago, the king of a tribe in the Roof of the World ventured alone to the south, seeking adventure. In early Winter, near the city of Damascus, he beheld in the west a star of surpassing brilliancy, and following this sign, he fell in with two other monarchs of men who had seen the star.

"It led them to the land of Judea, of the king Herod, where, seeking the child that had been born under the portent of the star the three came to Bethlehem, and to the stable where One was born who was not a king but the Son of God. So it befell that the three kings, out of their wisdom, were called the Magi by those who watched them tender their gifts and depart to their own lands.

"The one who went back into the mountains of Asia ruled with a strong hand, and forgetting not the star, or the gift he had made, took on himself the faith of the Christians, and was baptised under the name of John, and was called by some Presbyter or priest.

"So also were baptised the eldest sons of his line, my sires," concluded Prester John. "Aye they lived their allotted time rejoicing, for they were strong men and very palladins of God; they feared not the sword of any man, but guarded their people with the sword. Yet I, the last of the line, am otherwise, for I am blind and may not put on the shining armor or take up the brand. That is my shame.

"Since the time of my grandsire tales have come to us through the Moslem caravans, that Christian palladins of the west have conquered Jerusalem but their armies have not come beyond the Euphrates, and the missives I have sent to them have had no answer." *

So Prester John spoke, and when he ceased one of the pages who had returned to the hall cried out—

"Sire, there is no woman within the wall of the garden, but out on the plain a myriad horsemen draw in toward the city."

"Come with me to the tower," said the king, "and serve me with your eyes."

Without guidance from the warriors the blind man felt his way up to the summit of the tower. A brisk wind whipped at his long locks, and the level light of the hour before sunset struck through the garden, and revealed as the boy had said, black specks on the brown plain entering the wooded districts about the river, among the foothills. Mingan's keen sight identified the first comers as Jelairs and Keraits, several thousand of them, and behind, in a wide arc, the dark blotches of pursuing cavalry.

"The Horde!" cried Chepe Noyon. "At Jamuka's heels."

Swiftly he told Prester John of Jamuka's attempt to withstand Genghis Khan, his defeat, and flight to the city.

The lines in the blind man's face deepened, but his voice was unhurried as ever as he explained how Jamuka had come to Tangut professing to be a convert to Christianity, how—in the king's inability to leave the castle—he had allowed Jamuka first to guard his frontier, then to wear the bear's head that was the token of the leader of the Tangut horsemen, how Jamuka had warned him of the arrogance and hostility of Genghis Khan, whom he called the manslayer.

At first Prester John had waited for the son of Yesukai, who had been his friend, to come to the castle. But Genghis Khan did not appear, and the tale was spread in Tangut that the Mongol had slain old Podu, the Gipsy chief, and had threatened the death of Prester John. Then the Horde had come.

"The Master of Plotting," responded Mingan promptly, "is also a master of lies. Pretending to be the friend of Genghis Khan, he planned to make himself master of the Horde. Aye, King of the Keraits, he misused the power you gave him, seeking to use the Keraits against the Mongols. Jamuka is a Moslem, and his was the treachery of which I spoke. He is the real gainer from the caravan trade——"

"Yet he trusted me with the maiden whom he will make his wife——"

"See you not," Mingan said fiercely, "his

---

*The first crusade reached Jerusalem in 1099, and in the time of the last Prester John, Richard of England, called the Lion Heart, had failed through no fault of his own in his long conflict with Saladin, the Turkish sultan. The letters of Prester John were forwarded to the Pope, and resulted in the journey of various priests into Cathay, but by then Prester John and his kingdom of Tangut was no more than a legend in the Mongol empire.

trickery? He has taken away your men from the castle, placing here his own instead—his cavalry patrols control the city, until his coming. He will hold Tangut, at the river, until the full power of the Keraits can join him, coming through the mountain passes to the castle. The daughter of Podu is to be the bride of Genghis Khan, and Jamuka, aware of her worth as a hostage, has hidden her somewhere within the wall, knowing that none will come to seek her here."

As he spoke the sun left the valley and passed from the great plain, so that the oncoming horsemen and their pursuers were blotted out in the shadow of the mountain. And, plainly to be heard, the bells of the city sounded the alarm, while from the lower valley came the faint fanfare of trumpets.

Prester John faced the city as if striving to behold the truth of what was happening with his blind eyes. Mingan and the Kerait youth were no more than two voices to him, and their words were the knell of his hopes. Yet his hand did not tremble and his lean, brown face was impassive.

"My people are in danger. I will go down to them."

To go down into the city, a blind man in the center of pandemonium, would be to reveal his affliction to the multitude. His world was, in very truth, falling about his ears. There was stern stuff in the old king, and briefly he explained what must be done.

With Chepe Noyon he would descend the stair and summon Jamuka to him, to judge whether the Master of Plotting had deceived him. If so, Prester John would take over the command of the warriors in Tangut, and hold the defenses at the Turkish end of the city by the river, long enough to arrange a truce with Genghis Khan. The war must be stopped and the slaying of the Keraits ended before the city fell and was given up to sack by the Horde.

To Mingan, who knew that Jamuka must keep the Keraits in the fight to save his own skin—and who had seen the remorseless anger of Genghis Khan when aroused—this seemed impossible.

"Who are you, to question the ways of God?" responded the king sternly. "He who divided in twain a river and brought forth water from a rock can quiet the quarrels of men, aye, though my blind eyes can not see the road before us."

"And yet," pointed out the Cathayan, "there be two armed men—three for the captain of archers has come up the stair—at the gate, and my companion and I are weaponless."

"Come with me,"

Prester John issued an order to one of the boys who ran ahead of them, and in the hall brought to the king a cuirass of steel-bands sewn upon a leather-tunic, a helmet, brightly polished, bearing for crest the steel image of a crouching lion. The other page hastened up with a cloak of red velvet and a long sword of iron, with edges of keen steel.

Over these objects Prester John passed his hand with a quick sigh and ordered the boys to arm Chepe Noyon.

"This is the armor and the sword of the king, my sire," he explained, "and it is known to my people. My son, if your words against Jamuka have been false, you will not live to take off this armor."

To Mingan it seemed that, though Chepe Noyon had told the truth, there was not much hope for the Tiger. But Chepe Noyon's teeth flashed under his mustache and he whirled the long brand above his head.

"Meanwhile," ordered the blind man, "do you, Cathayan, seek out the captive. Guard her from harm and bring her to my side."

Mingan watched the strange array go down the path from the castle door to the gate—the tall form of the blind man followed by the glittering figure of the Tiger, the two boys and the mastiff bringing up the rear—and shook his head. Then, as he turned aside with Mukuli to the terraces he caught his breath.

It was the brief space of full sunset and in the flames of the western sky there stood out a single star. Before now Mingan had watched the evening star appear, yet he fancied it had never been so brilliant as now when it gleamed into the shadows of the garden of Prester John.

IX

THE FIGHT ON THE STAIR

IN THE half-light of sunset it startled the captain of the Turks more than a little to behold the approach of the blind man and his companion in strange armor. Peering at them, he took his stand in the path, inside the closed portal of the wall, the two negroes on either side of him.

"Stand, and advance not," he challenged.

But Prester John went forward until he touched the bar of the gate, and felt that the door was closed.

"Open!" he said sternly. "I am the king."

The Turk shook his head.

"What king? Jamuka commands in the city, and by his order none shall leave the castle, nor shall the gate be opened until he comes." He thrust the blind man's hand from the bar. "Harken to yonder outcry below, graybeard, and flee to your hall. The Mongol dogs are crossing the river, and Jamuka will abandon the city streets, drawing hither his men to defend the stair. Nay, the angel of death walks below us—harken to his voice!"

Faintly below them a rush of sound came up from the valley—a buzzing that grew to a roaring burst of men's voices, clashing weapons and screaming of horses. The Turk put his ear to the gate.

"Jamuka will be here in the space of an arrow flight——"

"And will find your body, if you open not the gate," Chepe Noyon's voice menaced him, as he turned angrily.

"Ho, this should be the minstrel! With a goodly array of children and dogs and prating graybeards——"

The Turk leered, and as he spoke, drew his simitar and cut at the warrior. Chepe Noyon parried with his sword and sprang aside to strike down one of the mutes who rushed at him with javelin upraised. Before he could face the other warder the captain of archers was on him, slashing at throat and legs.

The Tiger knocked the simitar aside and thrust with his heavy blade, through the beard of his adversary over the coat of mail, and, wrenching free his weapon, was aware of the other foeman who circled, dagger in hand to strike him. Then Prester John loosed the mastiff that he had held by the collar, with a swift word of command.

The great dog rose from the ground, leaping against the chest of the negro and knocking him from his feet. Chepe Noyon stunned the fallen man with a blow of his sword, caught at the bar, and drew open the gate.

Over his head came a flutter of wings and a shrill voice that cried out of the air:

"Prester John goes forth—pray, ye who are faithful—Prester John goes forth!"

It was the parrot, attracted by the clash and gleam of steel, crying one of the phrases that it had learned from the servants of the castle.

Chepe Noyon strode out to the edge of the steps with the king, and halted with an exclamation. By the caravanserai fires were springing up, revealing masses of horsemen moving through the streets of Tangut toward the upper end of the valley. On each side of the lake barriers were being erected across the side-alleys by throngs of Kerait warriors. Fighting was in progress in the plaza. Half-way up the stair, with a score of warriors at his heels, a man who wore the skin and head of a bear was climbing toward them.

"Jamuka is on the steps, O king," he explained quickly, "and his men with him. We can not go down—unless even now you have trust in the scheming dog."

Prester John bent his head.

"God's will be done. Nay, the guard at the gate was proof that Jamuka tricked me, who am unworthy of my high place. Let us defend the stair against him, for one of us must live to reach the Mongols and make peace."

"Go back, then, O my king, into the castle!"

"Not so. This is my place."

Prester John leaned a moment on the shepherd's crook that he carried for a staff, his lips moving in prayer. The two boys collected the javelins and took their stand beside the warrior who watched Jamuka win to the last flight of steps and start up the steep ascent, his men panting after him. Then Chepe Noyon lifted his head and smiled. He took off the heavy helmet and flung it clanging down the steps, among the Turks.

"Tear off your mask, Jamuka," he called. "This time you can not hide your face."

* * *

MINGAN'S actions on leaving the castle hall were peculiar to say the least. He whistled up Mukuli and began to run with the brown dog around the buildings in widening circles, urging his four-footed ally to seek out something. If the king had heard Burta's voice last night, the Gipsy must have been within ear-shot of the castle.

Near the flock of sheep, the dog stopped, nosed around and set off, barking into the wood. Mingan followed, running hard to keep up, but using his eyes nevertheless in the failing light.

Burta would be guarded by some of Jamuka's men, and the Cathayan was not the one to fall into an ambush blindly. It was impossible, however, to silence Mukuli. Now as he went, his long legs carrying him swiftly, Mingan was aware of a ponderous shadow that lumbered after him, and of a spotted form that slipped through the brush at his side.

The dog's barking had brought the bear and the leopard on the same quest. A chill chased up the man's spine, for he had not even a stick in his hand and it was nearly dark among the trees and—he had no great faith in the gentleness of Prester John's pets.

He emerged into a lighter clearing and approached the pond where the kiosk stood. Mukuli headed directly toward the bridge, but half-across stopped with a growl. From the garden house came a man tall as he was broad—a burly, turbaned servant with a drawn dagger. As Mingan set foot on the narrow bridge, the Turk walked toward him rapidly, angrily motioning him away.

For a moment the two faced each other. Then as Mingan did not give ground the slave lifted his knife and took a step forward. Experience had taught Mingan the danger of moving backward over uneven ground, and he poised on his toes, ready to grapple with the heavier Turk. He was pretty sure that Burta was in the kiosk, and—he owed his life to the Gipsy.

Suddenly, watching his adversary's face, he saw the protruding eyes widen, heard the whistle of indrawn breath. He was aware of two eyes on one side that glowed green, and on the other side a shuffling form that rose up on its hind legs with a snort. Mingan knew that the leopard and the bear were looking on, but the slave was startled.

For an instant the Turk's attention wavered and Mingan sprang at him, thrusting low, and striking the man's knees with his shoulder. The big slave was knocked back against the low parapet of the bridge, lost his balance and fell into the pond, splashing through the water lilies and losing his dagger as he did so.

When he gained his feet—the pond was shallow—he beheld the green eyes blazing down at him from the bridge, and the long tail of the leopard twitching excitedly down from the other side. The slave quailed and turned toward the shore. But there, in the last of the twilight, he was confronted by what seemed a fat man watching him. When the man-like shape dropped to four feet and growled, the slave yelled aloud and went splashing back, to flee from the far side of the pond.

Meanwhile Mingan had found Burta lying in the kiosk, and picked her up, carrying her easily in his arms back over the bridge and along the path that led to the castle gate. She was in a heavy sleep, induced by opium or hasheesh, administered probably by the hand of the guard after her cry of the night before.

As he neared the entrance to the wall he heard the clashing of weapons, and the low voices of men. In the open gate stood the blind king, arms outstretched. In front of him the Tiger was fighting desperately, giving back when he was hurt, ringing himself with the slashes of the long sword. Several men-at-arms engaged him while others held torches, and from the open muzzle of a bear's head peered the face of Jamuka, wet with sweat and twisted with rage and impatience. On the blood-stained landing were the bodies of the two boys and the mastiff.

Mingan stooped to lay Burta on the ground, to run to the side of his friend. But from the stair below the struggling men came a shout of triumph:

"*Hai, aho-ho! Mongku-hai, Mongku-ho!*"

Mingan knew the voice. The Turks redoubled their efforts; a pole ax smote Chepe Noyon on his mailed-chest and the Tiger fell heavily, lying where he had fallen.

"Through the gate! Close it!" cried Jamuka, thrusting forward.

Now as he ran to enter the portal there confronted him the tall form of Prester John, hands uplifted, the shepherd's crook barring the way. With a snarl of rage, the Master of Plotting whipped out his simitar and passed it into the body of the blind man. In a frenzy, Jamuka hacked again and again at the falling form of the king, until Mingan turned away his eyes.

He heard the men-at-arms tumbling through the portal into the safety of the wall, looked and saw them trampling over the two bodies in the path, heard the gate creak as Jamuka sought to close it after them.

Then a figure in rusted and blood-stained armor rose above the steps and leaped into the gap between door and gate post. A torch thrust into the eyes of the nearest Turks, and a great ax swung wide at them. It was a figure topped by flaming red hair, grimed and slashed almost beyond knowing, but nevertheless Subotai, the Buffalo, the swordbearer of Genghis Khan. Behind the giant climbed into view other warriors, panting and grinning with triumph.

"Ho, foxes," laughed the Buffalo. "We have run you to earth."

The man-at-arms who held the pole ax that had struck down the warrior, Chepe Noyon, lifted his weapon and stepped toward Subotai, who did not raise his ax. Instead the right arm of the Buffalo snapped forward with a flick of the wrist. His broadax flew forward, striking the Jelair in the face, cracking open his forehead.

By now the oncoming Mongols were crowding through the door. Jamuka turned as if for flight, thought better of it, and cast down his sword, motioning his score of men to do the same. The Master of Plotting actually smiled and took his stand over the dead Prester John. Bewildered by the calm of his foe, Subotai scowled, motioned back his men, and peered into the surrounding shadows distrustfully. Behind him voices called out:

"*Temou*. 'Way for Genghis Khan!"

The ranks of the Mongols opened, and the chieftain came through the gate.

He was helmetless, and his black eyes gleamed in the torchlight; his gaunt cheeks showed that for days he had not left the saddle. Mingan saw that, although now leader of a hundred thousand riders, he wore the same stained armor of rude iron-plates, hacked to pieces in many places. He looked around unhurriedly—he could move quickly enough when necessary as those watching him knew, and for that reason a silence fell on the men at the gate of Prester John.

So quiet were they that the roar of conflict welled up from the town beneath distinctly. It was quite dark by now and Mingan, a stone's throw from the group under the torches, was invisible. Chepe Noyon, in his strange armor, lay face down among other dead.

"Have you seen aught of the Tiger and Mingan?" Genghis Khan asked Jamuka. "The two Palladins rode hither seeking Burta, and here they should be."

Out of the corner of his eye the Master of Plotting glanced at the body of Chepe Noyon that lay without semblance of life. Mingan, he believed, was long since dead of hunger in the Gobi sand.

"Nay, my cousin," he made answer, trying to read the face of the Mongol. "Your heroes have not crossed my path."

Now Jamuka's life hung by a hair, and before any one else could speak, he made a last attempt at trickery, bold as it was clever. With his foot he turned over the body of the blind king so that Genghis Khan could look down at the hacked breast and bloodied features.

"Here O my khan, have I slain your greatest enemy, Prester John, the Christian. He it was who plotted against you without ceasing, who hunted you from place to place like a ferret. Of his skull will I fashion you a drinking cup, set with diamonds and covered with gold.

"I yield myself captive to you."

Stooping, he plucked some blades of grass and set them between his teeth in token of submission.

"By Allah, I fought against you, obeying the command of this king, but when he took the maiden Burta, to hold as hostage, my heart turned from him, and, forcing my way into his walls, I slew him. At your feet I place my life. I have spoken."

"And falsely."

Mingan appeared walking toward them out of the darkness, the Gipsy girl in his arms. In a few words he related how he had found Burta under guard of one of Jamuka's slaves. As he held the girl, her head falling back from his elbow, her tresses hanging to the earth she seemed to be without life. Mingan himself did not know whether she breathed or not, so heavily had she been drugged.

For a second the deep-set eyes of Genghis Khan searched the face of the woman he loved, after his fashion, and the fingers of his right hand closed into a knotted ball. He looked inquiringly at Jamuka, who had started back in dismay.

The Turk was too wise to deny Mingan's charge.

"All this is true," he admitted. "At the command of Prester John was it done. To him the blame, to me the fault that I obeyed him. Now I would serve you."

On the ground near his feet a man stirred, iron armor clinked, and Chepe Noyon raised himself on an elbow arduously. The first thing that became clear to the Tiger's hazy sight was the thin face of Jamuka. The next was the body of Prester John.

"Ha, Jamuka! Brave Jamuka—Podu in his sleep, and now a blind man slain by your hand! Dogs could not have sired you—dogs are faithful, and you betrayed the blind who trusted you! A sword—give me a sword. Ho, Mingan, are you near me? Help me to go up against this snake——"

The eyes of Genghis Khan glowed, and he held down the wounded man who was struggling to rise. Peering at him, Chepe Noyon recognised him and sank back.

"A boon, O my khan. Never have I asked a boon until now. Let me finish my quarrel with Jamuka, but first do you cry a truce, that the lives of the Keraits below in the city be spared. They were deceived by this Thing that walked out of a dunghill. They are no foes of yours. O my khan, this that was Prester John is slain, and I ask of you what he came forth to beg——"

"The Keraits withstand me with weapons in their hands, let them die so!"

The mask of anger did not fall from the grim countenance of the master of the Horde. Motioning the half-frantic Tiger to silence, he strode among the Jelairs, confronting Jamuka.

Now to do this it was necessary for him to step over the blind man, and Mingan saw him glance once downward, inquiringly, a little contemptuously. A weakling, this, the glance said as plainly as so many words—was this graybeard who could not save even his own life the Prester John of Asia? It was so, in effect, that Genghis Khan greeted and said farewell to the friend of his father, for thereafter he thought of him no more, save to consent at Chepe Noyon's request, that the body be buried under the altar of the cross in the castle.

"Jamuka, my cousin," his deep voice proclaimed, "you are like the partridge that hides in the brush—like the horned-owl that strikes at night. From afar my falcons have looked down upon your work of blood. I am not blind. I followed the tracks of the riders who raided the Mongol *ordu* during the snow season, and I saw that after a long time, they led back to the Jelair lands. I looked for the branding marks on the ponies that rushed into my camp at Podu's feast, and they were Jelair marks, the Turkish wrestler who would have slain me with a dagger was your servant—as I knew when I advanced to meet him."

He put his right hand on the Turk's shoulder, gravely.

"You would have slain me; when you failed, you won over the Keraits by deceit, so that you could overcome me and sit in my place. You have been faithless to one master; how could you be faithful to me?"

"I—" began Jamuka and said no more.

He stooped for the sword he had dropped, and felt the hand of the Mongol slip under his chin. He was lifted from his feet, thrust higher, until the small of his back was on the shoulder of Genghis Khan, and legs, head and arms dangled helplessly.

Once more the throng of men divided as the Mongol, walking heavily, moved through them, to the head of the steep, granite stair. The arms of the chief tightened around Jamuka's head. A quick tensing of muscles, a heave of the powerful body and Jamuka flew out into the air, seen for a second in the torchlight before he dropped a hundred feet upon the stone steps, his neck broken before the hands of Genghis Khan released him.

The master of the Horde stood quietly on the landing, his broad figure outlined against the glow that was rising from the town beneath, where thatched roofs were beginning to flare up. The followers of the slain Jamuka quivered as if a cold wind had struck them, and all at once caught up their discarded weapons, turning to run despairingly into the darkness whither Subotai and his warriors pursued them.

Genghis Khan however returned to where Burta lay, and put his hand over her heart. He started, feeling that she lived. Brushing back the tangle of hair from her eyes he saw that she was conscious and knew him.

The mask-like immobility of the man softened a little, and for the first time Mingan saw his eyes shining with exultant happiness. Burta saw it, too—indeed she had been watching, fearfully, for just that.

"Temujin," she whispered, "you have come and you have not altered. You are Temujin, even though they call you conqueror and Great Khan."

But Genghis Khan said nothing, only signing to his followers to carry the girl down to the ranks of his men. Out of sheer despair the Tiger gave utterance to his plea again, seeing that the anger of the chief had lessened. Genghis Khan looked at his two palladins with something like satisfaction.

"Aye, Chepe Noyon, you have done well. Go down to my *tumans* and command that their swords be sheathed, and their bowstrings loosed. If the Keraits will submit to my rule and aid me with horses and men, I will number them among mine."

So the Tiger departed down the steps, and in time the tumult died, and horses were heard withdrawing from the streets. Then Genghis Khan gave order to Subotai and Mingan to bear the body of the dead king into the castle, and see that it was honored.

They placed the form of the blind man on the table before the altar, and put new candles in the candelabra, thereafter sitting in the chairs and talking together, soft-voiced for reason of the emptiness of the great hall and the whispering of the wind against the hangings, until the Tiger rejoined them, moving wearily, but fired with joy that the truce had been established.

Now as the three palladins greeted one the other, glad to be united after hardships, Chepe Noyon held up his hand. From the high windows of the hall came, above the rustle of the night wind, the flutter of wings and a crying voice that grew fainter until it passed from their hearing:

"Prester John goes forth—pray ye who are faithful—Prester John goes forth from the castle."

X

MINGAN'S RIDE

"No song of birds is heard in the vines on the walls; only the wind whistles through the long night, where ghosts of the dead wander in the gloom.

"The fading moon twinkles on the falling snow; the fosses of the wall are frozen with blood and bodies with beards stiffened by ice.

"Each arrow is spent, every bowstring broken—the strength of the war-horse is lost.

"Thus is the city of Cathay."

Song of a Chinese minstrel.

THE whisper began in the east, at the Wall of Cathay, and crept out across the Mongolian steppe. Spring came early, that momentous year the tenth of the twelfth century of Our Lord. And, traveling with the harbingers of Spring, mounted couriers rode west and south with the message that began at the Great Wall.

The riders went to the tundras, at the edge of the frozen regions where snow hemmed in the dark camps in wet ravines; sleds drawn by reindeer moved out upon the snow, to the settlements of Subotai's people, and other riders passed swiftly south over wet, wind-whipped prairies, stopping only for a change of horses at the *ordus* of the tribes.

And wherever the pony-couriers had passed, there sounded the clang of hammers in the huts of the smiths, the murmur of subdued talk in the Winter-tents of the warriors, the shrill outcry of herd boys sent to round up horses.

Like a giant awaking from a long sleep, the steppe threw off its inertia of the Winter and became a living thing. For the first time in its history the Mongolian steppe was under the rule of one man, and there was peace throughout it—except at the Wall.

So, too, when the pony-couriers—the messengers arranged by Genghis Khan for just such an event as this—had left the post-stations in the Gobi, long caravans of camels forged into motion over the high prairies and the sandy bottoms, going east.

Spring had come, and with it the message of war.

Around their fires the nomad Gipsies, and the desert-men nodded wisely. They had known the tidings before the couriers of the khan rode past. How? Well, that was their affair. They laughed and gambled with open hand, fighting among themselves, counting the horses, the gold and jade they would bring back as spoil from Cathay. How would they overcome the Wall, the barrier that had not been broken down since it was built, hundreds of years ago? Well, that was Genghis Khan's affair.

Beyond the Gobi, the couriers rode, covering a hundred and fifty miles a day through the fertile valleys of the west, clattering into Tangut, still drowsy under its mantle of Winter, the castle—uninhabited except by birds and an aged bear that limped out of its retreat to sniff the mild air—looming black against the blue sky, massive and forbidding as the tomb that it was.

Over more valleys, through populous settlements of hunters and herders of the streams that were now freshets, racing down from the mountains, the couriers followed their course until they came to the roof of the World whither broad roads had been opened up by order of the conqueror, to the Horde, encamped by a lake that reflected the mighty buttresses of mountains, to the palace tent of Genghis Khan and there they delivered their message.

Chung-hi, now the Dragon Emperor, had sent an army out of the wall of Cathay, to the land of the Three Rivers, hoping to strike a blow at the home of Genghis Khan while the Horde and its master was absent.

However, although Mukuli was in Winter camp, the old Tatar—left in command of some fifty thousand riders—had not been caught napping. He had drawn the invaders out into the open plain, had defeated them and pressed the pursuit until he now held the districts of Cathay as far as the river Hoang-ho and the Wall. Aware that the gage of battle had been flung down between the Dragon and Genghis Khan, the Manchus, kindred of the Tatars had marched with their bowmen around the gulf of Liao-tung, to join Mukuli, who, thoroughly pleased by the mistake of Chung-hi, was at the head of more than a hundred thousand warriors. He was plundering the towns this side the Wall of arms, captives and supplies, and asked only that Genghis Khan come with the Horde and break down the Wall for him. Mukuli was too wise to try that himself.

* * *

"THE Dragon has stretched a claw over the Wall, and had it nipped," laughed Chepe Noyon. "Chung-hi must be a fool. *Ohai!* The Buffalo has been given the gold tablet of an *orkhon* and sent, with the center of the Horde, out of Tangut to the Wall. Genghis Khan is making ready the rest of the Horde at Tangut and sends for me to take the standard of the Keraits, so a hundred and twenty times a thousand riders will follow me presently. And what will you do?"

"I am summoned to the palace tent, to the Khan."

"The Cathayans are your people," mused the Tiger, who seldom waxed thoughtful. "What will you do?"

"I do not know."

"Well, you must go with me, and we may not stop to drink by the wayside. These times are good times. Ten years ago we were youths, and mock heroes—appointed to rank when Genghis had no more than his shadow to his name and needed palladins to make a showing at Podu's tents. Now elder chiefs dismount to hold our horses. We have cup-bearers a score and slaves a hundred, to rise up when we clap our hands. Women——"

"Talk less than you. Come, if we must!"

"These times are good times, but dull," assented the Tiger, who was now a man grown, and attired in the choicest silks of India. He was heavier in his tread, but restless as ever—more arrogant with the power that had come to him, yet devoted to his first friends Mingan and Subotai. "I have never seen the courts of Cathay, Mingan. Have they really palaces high as hills and chairs of pure gold, and women with eyes like black opals?"

Mingan stroked his beard, frowning.

"Be not so sure that you will see the courts of Cathay that lie beyond the Wall. First you must win through the Wall, and that no army has done."

The summons had reached them a week late, for the two palladins were hunting in the mountain passes.

Mingan had been well content these last years, going with the Horde when Genghis Khan led his power—strengthened by the Keraits—against the peoples of the Roof of the World, as far as the bleak mountains that offered only rock-strewn sides that vanished up among the clouds[*] and as far to the west as the fortified cities of the Turks. He liked seeing new lands and listening to the talk of philosophers and astrologers.

The fellowship of the three palladins had continued unbroken, although now with their duties as commanders they were seldom together.

As they assembled their followers and rode down the passes toward Tangut, Mingan was thoughtful.

"The success of Genghis," he observed, "is due to two things—his campaigns have been on level land, where horsemen can maneuver readily; likewise he is the finest leader of men in Asia and lesser chiefs are attaching themselves to him, for their own advantage. Yet the horsemen of the Horde can not out-maneuver the walled cities of Cathay, and Chung-hi's forces have machines to throw stones and fire, and great javelins. As against the three hundred thousand of the Horde, Chung-hi has a million."

"You are middle-aged and foolish,"

---

[*] The new empire of the Mongols extended to what is now Tibet, and to Russian Turkestan.

scoffed the Tiger. "Mountains are as bad for horses as walls, yet Genghis built bridges of chains and tree-trunks across these gorges and roads around the steep slopes. I will wager with you a hundred milk-white Arab barbs against gold to the weight of a man that I ride my horse through the Wall."

"You will not do that. Ah, it is in my mind to turn the heart of Genghis from this war."

"As well try to stem one of yonder freshets. But do you take my wager?"

"Very well."

IT WAS a clear, star-lit night when Mingan answered for himself to the mounted patrols outside Tangut, and entered the familiar lines of the camp across the river from the city. He picked his way through the horse herds, sniffing the warm odors of the felt tents, the taint of dung-smoke in the air, and the smell of leather, and the reek of the camels that muttered dismally somewhere out of sight.

There were miles of tents, and standards that Mingan had never seen before, also black, shapeless masses standing in line. Carts, they were, loaded with supplies. Beside these were innumerable oxen, their muzzles thrust placidly into dried grass and barley on the ground.

All at once, as if he saw the Horde with new eyes, Mingan became aware of the power of it. And now—it faced Cathay.

Horses thudded softly past him, turning into the tent lanes, as he made out the yak-tail standard planted in front of the largest pavilion.

As Mingan dismounted to enter the palace tent where, late though the hour was, lights still burned, he raised his eyes and beheld against the horizon glow the castle of Prester John.

It was now, he thought, the tomb of the blind king, who had kept faith with his God. What if Prester John had not withstood Jamuka? He might be alive, and Mingan dead at the hands of the Turks. He wondered if there was a destiny that shaped men's fortunes, and if the stars foretold destiny.

He found Genghis Khan lying on the summit of a mighty dais; his women seated on the steps were tending the candles, and giving food and drink to the officers who sat about the throne, receiving orders. Burta, her head against the knee of the chieftain, looked at him and smiled.

"*Mende sun tabe tiniger buis ta?* Are you quite hail and well, my companion?" Genghis Khan greeted his friend. "Talk to me, O teller of tales. I would sleep until the dawn hour."

Chepe Noyon and the higher officers made their adieus, to seek their commands before the Horde should move eastward at daybreak. Some of the candles guttered out, and the guards of the pavilion leaned on their spears to take rest while they might. The captains, sword-bearers, the masters of the herds, and others who remained under the dais put their heads on their arms and slept at once, while Mingan's voice repeated the familiar tales of hunting, and the far-off places of Cathay that Genghis Khan liked.

Once, when a gust of air stirred the banners overhead, brushing the tresses of Burta the queen, who listened to Mingan, chin on hand, the Khan started up.

"Did the soul of Yesukai, my father speak? Surely then there came a messenger from the sky world of the elder heroes, while I slept. I will follow the path of vengeance, for that Yesukai died of Cathayan poison."

"O my lord," Burta's soft voice made response, "it was Mingan."

She watched the eyes of the chieftain close. On the morrow Genghis Khan would leave her, and only the gods knew when he would return, or in how long. She loosed the gold chaplet from her forehead, so that her dark hair fell around her face and Mingan could not see that she was sorrowful.

The teller of tales ceased his recital. The clink and thud of a mailed regiment passed the pavilion, answering the hoarse shout of the captain of the guard. Genghis Khan stirred, and slept again.

But his mouth was set in a hard line, furrows in his sloping forehead. Mingan, searching his face, knew that Temujin, the boy of the horse herd was dead, and Genghis Khan had taken his place, a leader and a slayer of men.

The Horde never slept. And Genghis Khan was master of the Horde; he had made it—Mingan started up as if out of a long slumber, a drowsiness of fifteen years. He touched Burta's knee, and put into her hand the gold tablet of *palladin* that he took from his girdle.

"O mother of princes, to you I say farewell. When the Khan wakens give this tablet to him, saying that Mingan, the friend of Temujin, is no longer at his side;

but Ye Liu Chutsai Mingan, of Liao-tung rides to join his people, in Cathay, to share their fortunes."

His lips barely moved in a low whisper.

"My sword and sword-belt are without the palace tent, where I will leave them. To Chepe Noyon and Subotai give greetings and my farewell. If ever I have served you, remember it for two hours, until the Horde arises for the march. Two hours must I have to win clear. Then forget the name of Mingan. *Kai*—be it so."

Not daring to remonstrate or answer, she nodded reluctantly. Over their heads the shoulders of the chief stirred as he raised himself on his hands, his eyes alert. He was wide-awake and he had heard the message of the *orkhon*.

Mingan stood up.

"I can not ride against my people. I must range myself with them, now that the Khan wars with Cathay."

He slipped down the dais steps and out the door, scarcely noticing the salute of the captain of the guard. Genghis Khan reached down and touched Burta's shoulder:

"Give it me—the tablet!"

Stifling a scream, her fingers pressing her lips, the queen handed him the square of gold, and his throat snarled as he felt of it. Quietly, so as not to awaken the sleepers, he made his way to the tent entrance. The officer on guard strode toward him watchfully; then, seeing who it was, fell on his knees.

"Gur-khan," the chief ordered brusquely, "seek out Mingan's brand from the pile. Take it, follow the hero to his tents, and be as his shadow until he quits the last line of our patrols and then—" his voice sank to whispered gutturals. "Fear not for your post; I will take command of the guard."

When the man had left to carry out his errand, the chief remained standing by the tent, looking up at the stars incuriously. He did not bother his head about portents or the working of destiny. He had his own way of dealing with men. Mingan had faltered, had become like a lame horse that must be loosed from harness.

Only, Genghis Khan was sad.

* * *

MINGAN handed his helmet and mail to his cup-bearer, and divested himself of his long mantle. Saying that he wished to go without attendance he glanced around his tent, seeing the bronze astronomical-instruments, the carved-ivory objects, the neatly piled manuscripts that he had collected in the last years. Then with a sigh he took down a hunting-spear from the tent wall, a sheepskin cloak and saddle-bags filled with food from the hand of another servant, and made his way to the picket-line of his horses.

Selecting the gray stallion, now a little aged and stiff of limb, and a long-striding mare, Mingan ordered a saddle for the gray horse, tested girths and breast-strap, and mounted, leading the mare by her halter.

An hour later he passed out of the tent-lines, a little uneasy, for it seemed to him that another rider was following him. If he should be halted and questioned he would be in grave danger, because he was leaving the Horde in time of war without permission and—soon Burta would deliver her message, he assured himself.

If there was a man on earth Mingan hated, it was Chung-hi, the new emperor. Yet no man more than the prince of Liao-tung knew the menace that now confronted Cathay. Inbred in him was the sense of loyalty of the Chinese to the reigning dynasty. He had sworn to the dead emperor that he would be faithful to the dynasty. So had his fathers been for countless generations, and Mingan could not go to them with a clear face if he did not keep his oath.

To do so, he must first try to reach the Wall before Mukuli and Subotai should attack it. Then he must present himself at the Dragon Throne, and abide by what followed. What? Mingan looked up at the stars searchingly, for the first time in his life wondering whether the planets were truly the messengers of destiny——

"Draw rein and stand. What is this led horse? Whence come you, and by whose order!"

Unseen by him several horsemen had been waiting in the deep shadow under some willows by the river-road. Mingan was confronted by a suspicious lieutenant, commander of a patrol, who did not know him by sight. From force of habit he felt in his girdle for the gold tablet, then he realized that he no longer had any insignia of rank on him.

While he pondered, a horse trotted up behind him and an authoritive voice spoke:

"I am gur-khan of the imperial guard.

This man goes forth by permission of the Khan."

The newcomer exhibited, in the half-light of approaching dawn the baton of a captain, and the patrol was satisfied. Then, without ado, the gur-khan handed Mingan his own sword, belting it into place. Gathering up his reins, he lifted his hand.

"May the way be open before you," he gave the customary salutation at parting. "Keep your distance from the path of the Horde, *orkhon*."

"May it be well with you," Mingan answered mechanically.

Urging his horse forward, he struck into a trot. He was on the first leg of a seventeen hundred mile ride to the Gobi and across the heart of the desert, to the Wall.

X

Distance proves the horse's strength and time the heart of man.

Chinese proverb.

THE gong in the tower over the Taitung or Western Gate of the Great Wall of Cathay struck the first hour of the day with an echoing clang; the commander of a thousand opened his almond eyes, yawned, spat and stood up, pretending not to look to see if the nearest commander of ten had noticed that he had been asleep. Satisfied, the officer who had charge of the gate, put on his wide-brimmed, tasseled hat, straightened the quilted-coat on his broad belly, tightened the belt from which hung the heavy two-handed sword that dragged on the ground, and drank a goblet of elderberry wine, first pouring a sparing libation to Kwan-ti the god of war.

It was hot under the tower roof; sweat, even at this hour of sunrise, trickled down the plump back of the commander of a thousand, and the wide, dusty road that wound into the plain of the west was whitish-yellow as the well-kept hands of the stout officer. For this was the month of the feast of *Hao*, when the sun was like a red ball in the midsummer sky.

Yet this month Chung-hi, the Son of the Dragon, was not coming to hunt in the western plain, instead herds of cattle, horses and men were pressing into the gates of the Wall to escape the Mongols, who, in the estimation of the worthy officer were uncouth barbarians.

He saw that the forces guarding the towers had been doubled. On the summit of the wall, eight paces wide and as high, blue-smocked soldiers were chattering over the morning rice pots.

A double line of spearmen was forming at the road inside the ponderous gates. A score of crossbow-men had laid down their weapons in readiness to lift down the three iron bars that had held shut the gate during the night. The officer yawned and almost forgot the customary morning kow-tow toward the Great Court. He blinked and scanned the sky—no smoke rising above the trees by the highway to the west; no hostile cavalry in sight. Only the herds of cattle, somewhat larger than usual, the tattered herders, and a dust-stained beggar with a long beard who limped forward, leaning on a staff, trying to push his way through the crowded cattle.

All was quiet. He gave the order to open the gate.

One after the other, the three bars came down, the lock was turned with a lever, the weaponless archers laid hold of handles on the twin doors and slowly, with a reluctant creak, the portals swung open.

The sun rose.

Dust eddied up as the cattle started into motion. The leading steers passed under him, lowering their horns and grunting. The dust thickened, and the outcries of the drivers grew louder. The commander of a thousand leaned against the framework of a catapult and fanned himself pleasantly.

"Worthy officer," observed a calm voice at his elbow, "it were well to close the gate. There are Mongols between the foot-hills of the Kinghan and here. In the night I heard the passing of their horses."

The fat man was disturbed to learn that the beggar with the beard had climbed the steps to the tower summit without being heard. So he became angry.

"Ignorant and worthless!" he reproved. "You do not know that there are watch-pillars every two *li* between here and the hills. By day a warning smoke would be in the sky, if the enemies of the Dragon were near—and a flare by night. I see nothing. Get you gone—I have no rice or water——"

So he said, observing the browned and cracked skin of the wanderer, the bloodshot eyes that glared with the glare of the dead. To show his superiority, he quoted a proverb—

"The blind man sees a ghost at night."

Somewhat to his surprize the tattered stranger responded with a proverb, speaking with the cultured inflection of a courtier.

"If you never climb a tree you will never see beyond the horizon. You, commander, can see the sky for five *li*. The Mongols can ride fifteen *li* between sunset and sunrise, and, surrounding one of your watch-towers, they can keep the summit clear of defenders with their arrows while they batter in the gate. Look to yourself!"

"Who are you, uncle?" said the officer a little uncertainly.

The wanderer hesitated.

"I am Ye Lui Kutsai Mingan, prince of the district of Liao-tung."

"The prince of Liao-tung was carried off by devils in the reign of the late emperor. You are a crazy man. It is true that the crazy man hopes the heavens will fall, the poor man hopes for a riot."

With an effort Mingan restrained his impatience. He was suffering. The gray stallion had died under him before he reached the sands on his long ride; he had bartered the mare and his sword for a camel, had crossed the desert, exchanged his worn out bactrian for a swift-footed pony and had foundered the animal three days ago. Thereafter, begging food of evenings, he had limped along the highway, fearing that the van of Subotai's army had caught up with him, although he had seen nothing of them. But in the last day no Chinese market carts had passed him.

Still, he was in time—if only the officer in charge would close the gate! There were men enough on the broad summit to hold it indefinitely—a hundred every arrow-shot along the parapet—squatting over their morning rice. Mingan did not like the looks of the rusty spears, or the chickens kept for dinner by some of the men-at-arms, or the cotton sun-shelters erected on spears, or the women camp-followers who strolled from group to group.

His tongue was swollen in his throat from thirst, and his fingers quivered with weariness. His glance went from the Wall to the highway and he uttered a soft exclamation.

From around the nearest turn, two miles distant, a tiny puff of dust appeared, rolling toward the wall as if blown by the wind. Mingan's eyes narrowed and he thought that black specks showed through the yellow dust.

"Look!" he cried.

The commander of a thousand looked, and his peace of mind was disturbed. He peered at the sky. No trace of warning smoke against the sheer blue. The dust was travelling too swiftly for carts or horse-sedans.

Clang! He struck the heavy gong with the bronze hammer, three times—the signal to close and bar the Western Gate, and to take stations on the wall.

The dust was spreading out, fan-wise, on either side the highway, as if a river in flood were surging around the turn in the road. It was little more than a mile away, and already the black dots that were riders could be seen on the horses. Mongols they must be, to maintain such a furious pace. But it was the sheerest folly for a sea of horsemen to dash against the rock barrier of the wall.

And then something happened, below them.

As if taking alarm at the sight behind them, the cattle herders began to drive their beasts forward furiously, shouting, waving their high straw hats, beating the steers on the outer fringe of the herds. A solid mass of horned cattle was driving through the gate. The soldiers who were shoving at the massive doors of teak and iron found that the pressure of the cattle made it impossible to budge the opened gates.

They tried to turn back the stream of frantic beasts. But the herds followed blindly the leaders that had passed through, and Mingan, studying the herders, was convinced that they were Mongols in disguise, and the cattle were captured herds, sent to the gate on purpose.

"Shoot down the beasts from the wall!" he shouted to the officer, who had begun to quiver all over with anxiety.

By the time archers lined the wall and began to send their shafts into the bellowing masses below, the Mongol attack was within a quarter-mile, and it was seen that the first few riders carried smoking torches. When these encountered the rearmost of the cattle, the beasts scattered to the sides of the road, out of the way of the fire and smoke.

A regiment of cross-bowmen had taken station on and near the tower, and their quarrels whizzed down at the oncoming horsemen. Meanwhile the rush of beasts through the gate had thinned out sufficiently for the laboring soldiers to move the doors inward a little. Seeing this one of the Mongol herders ran forward and cast himself down in the path of the swinging mass of wood and iron. His body was caught and wedged between the lower edge and the earth. A dull snapping of bones was heard, and the gate ceased to move..

Mingan saw a rider, the first of the Horde, dash through the portal, to be struck from saddle by a cross-bow bolt. Another suffered the same fate. Two companies of Chinese spearmen were running to form inside the gate, but their ranks were broken by the rush of horses which jammed through the opening, forced forward by the weight of the column behind.

The cross-bowmen on the tower had barely loaded and wound their weapons a second time. For a mile on the western side of the Wall, groups of mounted Mongols wheeled, discharging a cloud of arrows at the summit, sending shaft after shaft without pause, keeping the defenders engaged at a distance from the gate-tower, while the stream of horsemen passed through along the highway, wedging back the half-shut portals.

"I, unworthy," said the officer at Mingan's side quietly, "must now face my ancestors."

His limbs no longer trembled as, ordering the nearest commander of a hundred to hold the tower as long as possible, he turned and went down the steps with a firm tread. Pressing through the disorganized spearmen, he swung up his sword and cast himself among the ponies of the Mongols, disappearing from view almost at once.

The war shout of the Mongols rose over the clamor on the wall. A chief in resplendent attire came into view, looked up curiously at the overhanging bulk of the arch that was no longer a barrier, and ordered the mailed swordsmen that followed him to dismount and storm the tower steps from the rear.

Mingan, already down from the wall and out of the fighting, recognized Chepe Noyon, and reflected that he owed the Tiger a wager of a hundred weight of gold. He wondered, as he caught a riderless horse and threw himself into its saddle, if he were not dreaming—as in the past.

No one molested the ragged, weaponless man, and soon he was free of the throngs of fugitive soldiers and coolies. Looking back, he saw that the dragon standard had been cast down from the tower, while horsemen were riding up the steps, forming a column at the summit, to clear the top of defenders.

The battle of the Taitung gate had only begun, but Mingan had seen enough to know the result.

The Great Wall of China had fallen.

He urged his pony into a trot, and faced toward the city of Taitung, to complete the last stages of his journey and carry the news of the disaster at the gate to the emperor.

XI

THE PROPHECY OF THE STARS

THE court, however, had kept away from the western border and was, in that never-to-be-forgotten feast of *Hao*, at the capitol, Yen-king, which in time came to be called Pekin. And, with the court, the Emperor Chung-hi was shut up in the palace grounds.

On the day that Mingan rode into the streets of Yen-king, and crossed the bridge to the palace side of the city, he was told that Chung-hi with his officials, was listening to a new play in the garden of Delightful Hours.

Mingan stabled his horse—he had exchanged the tired pony at a village on the highway for another beast—in one of the alleys of the fortune-tellers' quarter, under the rising ground on which the palace enclosure stood, and climbed the steps toward the main entrance.

At the gate he looked down. Yen-king, vast as a kingdom within walls, was intent on the festival; streamers adorned the barges and junks on the gray river; processions wound through the main thoroughfares; the smoke of incense sprinkled alleys and pagoda steps alike.

He won past the sentries at the entrance, saying that he was a fortune-teller—his beard and tattered garments bearing out his pretense. Astrologers and trainers of canaries and dogs often came up to pray for attention from the nobles, and—this was a feast day.

"Good sirs," he bowed to the idle soldiers, "I read the stars. Let me within, to prophesy!"

His experience with the keeper of the Western Gate had taught him the uselessness of proclaiming his name and rank. As quickly as possible without attracting attention, he moved through the walks where he had played as a boy. The sun was very hot, and few people were about, but, beyond the dwellings of the queen and the imperial concubines, he found a group of slaves dressed in purple silk, loitering in front of the arch that gave entrance to the garden of Delightful Hours—a new pleasure spot, an artificial hill, built as Mingan learned later, so that the emperor could take his ease where the Summer breeze could be felt.

"I have tidings from the western wall," he announced, eagerly. "The barbarians have passed the wall. Let me in, to the Presence."

The leader of the slaves looked up from his task of feeding a peacock, and wrinkled his nose.

"The Son of Heaven may not be disturbed. Until evening he sits before the stage of the actors."

"Dolt!" Mingan's teeth gritted behind his beard. "I have ridden from Taitung, and before that, from beyond the sandy desert itself."

"Perhaps you have come, also, from the ten courts of purgatory," gibed the feeder of peacocks.

He extended his hand suddenly to finger Mingan's pouch and girdle for coins, fruitlessly.

"Assuredly you will be shortened by a head if you cry out like this in the hearing of the court."

The others laughed and fell to jostling the stranger, when Mingan planted his feet and smiled at them.

"Honorable keepers of an exalted post, if you will not admit me, send word within that the Wall has fallen."

Laughter greeted his remark, and, with a new inspiration, the prince joined in:

"You are merry, good sirs, and I would like to abide with you, but I am one of the actors in the play, and the time for my appearance on the stage is almost at hand. I must seek my companions and paint my face."

The leader of the slaves grimaced cunningly.

"A blind cat can smell a dead rat! The players are all within—aye, even the one that takes the part of a barbarian Tatar, a most evil person, whom you somewhat resemble."

Surveying Mingan's remnants of Mongol dress, however, he pursed his lips thoughtfully—

"Are you another——"

"Tatar," nodded Mingan. "And if the emperor is kept waiting you will all sleep this night in the city of old age—the burial-ground. Ha—do you misdoubt me? Did I not take the part of a rider from the steppe, with news? Aye, mark you well—now I am a courtier of Liao-tung."

He stood erect with folded arms and spoke a few words in the dialect of the educated classes. Observing the effect on the attendants, he changed swiftly to Mongol gutturals.

The slaves were convinced. No one, they thought, but an actor of merit could assume such varied rôles. Mingan passed up the steps to the highest terrace of the garden.

It was of vast extent. Here and there among the rose-beds groups of palace handmaidens sat, and guards rested in the shade. In the center, under a circle of canopies, the emperor and his courtiers listened to the declamation of the players on a bare stage in front of a clump of cypresses. Mingan surveyed the scene, frowning.

He could not penetrate the ranks of the nobility, nor, if he did so, would he be permitted to speak to Chung-hi. He must devise some way to catch the emperor's attention.

Suddenly he smiled and, circling the groups of people, sought out the clump of trees. These stood at the edge of the terrace, and behind them was a drop of a dozen feet. On the lawn below a half-dozen actors sat—jugglers, flame-swallowers and the like. Mingan judged that the players of the piece were all on the stage, to which a bamboo ladder gave access, from the lawn below, leading through the cypresses to the back of the stage.

Mingan descended hastily to the waiting performers and, paying no attention to their stares, appropriated a pair of the high shoes customarily worn by actors, and daubed his cheeks and forehead with red and gilt paint.

"What is this?" one of the mountebanks spoke up. "The Tatar of the play is already on the stage——"

"But I am not," smiled Mingan, and took advantage of the other's hesitation to step to the ladder and climb up the rungs. The tinkle of the orchestra became clearer, in tune with the drone of some one's voice.

Pushing aside the branches of the screening trees, Mingan strode out on the stage.

Only one other actor was within view of the audience—a man, dressed as a woman of the court, who was reciting some verses evidently of an amusing nature. The rest of the company, hidden behind branches of the cypresses that served as wings to the stage, hissed at Mingan angrily, and the "woman," surprized, ceased speaking.

Mingan stepped to the front center. The music—a wailing of reed-pipes, fiddles and drums—went on, because the orchestra was made up according to custom, of blind men. Schooled in the manners of the stage, it was easy for the prince to invent a verse in accord with the music—

> "Out of the sandy steppes I have come—like a wild goose flying before the storm."

Then came his introduction, as usage prescribed!

"I am a poor prince of Cathay, taken prisoner by the barbarians in my youth and forced to leave my beloved books for the pursuits of a warrior on the plain. From the ward of the barbarians I have learned many things not written in the books of the sages, and now in the hour of my empire's danger, I have come hither in the hope that I may take my place in the ranks of Cathay."

The other actor was staring at him in blank dismay, and the watchers under the canopies stirred with curiosity. Mingan's appearance had broken up the play most effectively, but he had the interest of the court and that was what he wanted. The music changed to a harsher note, and the prince followed it out. Stamping one high-booted foot, he looked around as if searching for something he did not see.

"Unhappily, I find the Lord of Ten Thousand Years—" he looked directly at Chung-hi seated in a chair raised above the others—"intent on other things than war. Where are the forty banners of the provinces, with their mailed hosts? Where are the standards of the sun, and the wind, and *lui kung*, the thunder? Alas, I do not see them. Is it possible that the emperor has not been informed by his servants of the danger that confronts him?"

He leaped down among the musicians who, aware that something was amiss, ceased playing as Mingan advanced across the intervening space to the chair of Chung-hi, where he made the triple obeisance.

Chung-hi, grosser of body, more arrogant of face, gripped the carved arms of his throne-chair, frowning. Mingan, abandoning the false tones of an actor added gravely—

"The Mongols have broken through the wall, and are besieging Taitung."

"What mockery is this?" demanded the emperor wrathfully.

After fifteen years, he did not recognize in the sun-burned and bearded plainsman the prince of Liao-tung.

"Sire, it is truth." He pointed out over the flower hedges of the garden. "From the stage I saw the warning smoke of distant watch-towers, and, thereafter, your mailed cavalry of Liao-tung bannermen forming in front of its barracks under the palace hill."

Here and there officials rose; some whispered to attendants, who moved out to the edge of the Garden of Delightful Hours, to look down on the city. Returning, their startled faces confirmed Mingan's tidings.

"By the first Dragon of the sky," cried Chung-hi, "what man are you?"

It crossed Mingan's mind that fifteen years before, this same Chung-hi had sought to slay him by stealth, fearing the omen of the stars that the dynasty of Cathay was nearing its end, while that of the prince of Liao-tung was ascendant. If he took an assumed name and claimed merit for his warning, Mingan might be rewarded well. Certainly, the men who stared at him now believed him dead. But his pride!

"I am Ye Lui Kutsai Mingan, last prince of the north, of Liao-tung. The tale that I repeated on the stage was true; by that device only was I able, sire, to gain a hearing."

Superstitious dread seized on the emperor. Mingan's sudden return to Cathay —his miraculous advent on the stage, in spite of the cordons of guards about the palace—his knowledge of what was still unknown in the city Chung-hi feared that this was a spirit sent back by the demons that had carried Mingan off. And he, Chung-hi, had driven the prince into exile.

"A lie!"

He peered at the tall figure in front of him.

Now there came to the emperor's side a

massive form in white, with age-wrinkled brow. It was the Servant of Mercy, the executioner of the court, who had once failed in the task of ridding Chung-hi of Mingan. The Servant of Mercy had a good memory, and seldom had he failed so signally.

And Mingan, recognizing him, drew back a pace, then smiled.

"Have you forgotten, Son of the Dragon, the night that you sought to slay me, and I fled from the palace in my hunting-chariot? Then here is one who can vouch for me."

The man in white looked long into the face of the prince, and his eyes gleamed. Stooping, he whispered into the ear of Chung-hi, and withdrew, moving quietly as an animal. What he said was this—

"This man is the one that was to be strangled fifteen years ago."

Whatever Chung-hi's faults, stupidity was not one of them. Assured that Mingan had come to him from the Horde, he was suspicious on the instant. Pretending incredulity, he shook his head.

"You are no more than a clever soothsayer, seeking our attention in this manner. What else seek you?"

"To serve with my regiments of Liao-tung, O Lord of Limitless Life! To use my poor wisdom in the service of Cathay."

This was Mingan's right as a prince of the royal line, and if Chung-hi admitted his identity it could not be denied him. But Chung-hi realized that to give Mingan command of the strongest branch of the army would be to raise him to popularity—and power. He had a vivid recollection of how the prince had made him lose face before his father, and—he shook his head again.

"As I thought. Either you are a hobgoblin out of the steppe, or you are a lying mountebank. Your tale is false as the voice of the grave bird crying at night among the tombs."

Chung-hi shivered a little, thinking of those others he had slain to clear his path of strong men. He signed to a group of spearmen.

"Take this presumptuous one under ward, and place him in the dungeon of offenders against the Throne, under the palace."

Mingan bent his head. The voice was that of Chung-hi, his cousin and his enemy, but the gilt-chair and the dragon-robe were those of the emperor of Cathay. It was possible for him to prove his identity, but even so, a command from the Son of the Dragon could make it necessary for him to commit suicide or be beheaded. To disobey a command from the Throne was impossible for one of his upbringing. And yet—only after an inward conflict was he able to submit to his fate.

Later, when he had his hearing before the Board of Justice, he would have an opening for speech and liberty.

"Yet, sire," he cried, "heed me in one thing; for if I am a soothsayer, I am a true prophet. The Mongols are stronger than you think. *Do not divide your armies, or send them against the Horde in open country.* Muster your strength in Yen-king, and keep behind the great walls until losses compel Genghis Khan to withdraw."

He glanced eagerly at the perturbed general of Yen-king, a stout eunuch brave in the finery of his rank, and at the aged scholar who was president of the Board of Imperial Strategy.

"Now," a quizzical smile lighted his dark face, "my rôle is ended——"

Chung-hi hastily shook his sleeve by way of dismissal to the prisoner. At the same time he confided in the nearest officials that the fortune-teller must be a little mad—or a Mongol spy. Had not he, Chung-hi, a million awaiting his command in the warrior levies? Had he not been thinking of war with the Mongols? It would be a new diversion, better than the play—that was all.

"True — true," echoed the courtiers. "*Wan sui*—live for ten thousand years!"

PERHAPS in this feast of *Hao*, the guests on high, the dead heroes of Cathay grieved, knowing all things, of the past and future, even to the portents of the stars—for in that summer Cathay the unchanging, changed.

Their altars—the tablets of the ancestors—were neglected during the next months, although the shrines of Kwan-ti, god of war, lacked not for worshippers, and the very rivers were red with blood.

Chung-hi had intended to summon Mingan to question him in private, but events in the kingdom kept his mind occupied with other things. So it was months before the door of the dark cell opened for Mingan to come out. In that time the prince—

being a political prisoner—heard little of what passed in the world above, save a word or two—that Genghis Khan had been wounded by an arrow at Taitung, that the imperial armies had been divided into four commands, of two hundred thousand each—three to advance beyond the Hoang-ho to drive back the Horde, and one to hold the capital.

There was wondering and unrest among the northern regiments when they heard of the return of one who called himself their prince; then in the tumult of war he was forgotten by all except his warriors of Liao-tung and one who never forgot.

THE corridors of the underground prison had been deserted for at least a day when Mingan, lying on the damp stones, heard steps in the semi-darkness. His door was unlocked, and a man's hands fumbled with his fetters. Presently these fell off and Mingan saw that his visitor was tall and clad altogether in white silk.

"Servant of Mercy," he said calmly, "if you have come, then my hour is at hand."

The executioner helped him to his feet, took the end of his girdle in one hand and led him into the corridor, up winding steps to a hall where the air was sweeter and flickering candles stung Mingan's eyes, long accustomed to the gloom. Waiting until his prisoner could endure the light, the Servant of Mercy conducted him out a postern door, across a small court, up other steps into the anterooms of the audience hall of the emperor.

Mingan was aware of two things: It was night, the stars were glittering in the cool air of early Autumn, and the approaches of the palace were deserted. He wondered if Chung-hi wished his coming kept a secret.

Then he heard the measured intonation of temple gongs in the city beneath. Some important event was taking place.

The white-haired executioner folded his arms, his eyes closed. This bearing of a servant did not hide an impulse of strong feeling in the man.

"Your hour, Prince of Liao-tung, is at hand. If you harken to the voices of your ancestors—and I think you will—you will sit for the first time in the seat of honor. I, unworthy servant of the Dynasty, will choose the knife."

Mingan remembered the first visit of the strangler, when still a boy, he had slipped out of his bed and laughed at the man. But he was hearing the voice of the executioner as a human being for the first time, and the message puzzled him.

"Was that why you brought me from the cell? At whose command? Speak openly. After five thousand hours of looking into darkness and silence I am old, and am not disturbed."

In fact, Mingan's face was filled with tiny, new lines, and his eyes, slow moving, were those of a man indifferent to all things.

"No one commanded your release, my lord. I came because it was not fitting that one of noble lineage should starve like a kite in a cage, and because there was no one else to sit in state in this palace. And this night some one must sit in the hall of audience."

"Chung-hi."

"Chung-hi and his courtiers are fled out of the kingdom to the south. There is no one in the palace, save you and I and some old slaves and boys."

Mingan started.

"What of the garrison?"

"Chung-hi has taken it, to guard his person."

In few words the executioner explained that of the three armies sent against the Mongols one had gained a doubtful success, at the same time that the two others were overwhelmingly defeated by two portions of the Horde under Mukuli and Genghis Khan. Then the Horde had united, scattered the remaining command of the Cathayans, passed the Hoang-ho, and had entered the outer walls of the city, which were weakly manned by levies of citizens. The inner wall had opened its gates to the conquerors, who were now seeking for the palace.

"But the palace itself could be defended!"

"Alas, sir, the slaves have plundered it, and having hidden their spoil safely, have turned their coats—so that they shall not be known for attendants of the Dragon—and sought safety."

Now, looking out into the corridors, Mingan was aware of stealthy shapes that flitted from shadow to shadow, snatching where gold or silver glittered in the light of candles that still burned in their places. He questioned the executioner further—surely some one must be in command here.

The Servant of Mercy shook his head. The Master of the Slaves, left in charge of the palace, had carried off the handmaidens, to offer them as slaves to the Mongols, hoping thus to insure his safety.

Mingan reflected, and when he looked up again, it was with a purpose formed.

"Conduct me to the dressing-rooms, where court-garments are kept. It is not fitting that the palace should be found empty by the conquerors—like a thieves' nest."

Within the imperial wardrobes, he allowed the Servant of Mercy to cleanse his face and hands and comb his beard. Then he dismissed the man and himself found and put on the dragon-robe of ceremony, the plush cap with the peacock-feather of rank, and, folding his arms, made his way slowly down to the audience hall, now quite empty.

Empty, that is, except for the figure that lay extended on the step leading to the chair of the governor of the city. The Servant of Mercy had taken advantage of the interval to cut his throat here, as if to suggest to Mingan what seat he should occupy.

With a gesture of acknowledgment the prince stepped over the body of the faithful servant and sat down in the lacquered chair, leaning his head back against the silk tapestry that covered the wall. His eyes travelled down the vast extent of the tiled floor, empty as a tomb, and he mused upon the fate that had humbled Cathay.

Presently, bethinking himself of the farewell message custom prescribed, he took from his girdle the writing implements that were a part of the dress and traced on the lapel of the garment these words—

"Striving always to keep faith, I have labored against fate."

A PATTER of slippered feet, a panting and moaning, and into the hall ran a whining thing that, seeing Mingan sitting in state, cast itself at his feet, clutching with trembling fingers the hem of his robe. It was the master of the palace slaves, his fine purple coat turned inside out so that the gray lining might be unnoticed in the shadows of the corridors—all the bland composure with which he had once barred Mingan from the imperial gardens quite vanished.

"Excellency — majesty," he panted. "Exalted governor, guard me from the sharp-fanged dog that follows. I am a loyal servant, none more so——"

But with the words he shivered and from his wide sleeve fell strings of pearls, shimmering in the candle-light, and loose rubies and sapphires wrenched from their settings, plundered from the chambers of Chung-hi. What stifled his plea, however, was recognition of Mingan—not the governor of Yen-king, but the wandering actor whom the slave had struck.

Seeing the grave eyes that looked at him reprovingly from the thinned face, the master of the slaves scrambled to his feet, caught up some of the jewels and fled away up the hall, seeking a door by which he might leave it. A burly figure in deer-skins entered by the door through which the slave had come, a Mongol gur-khan armed with a heavy spear.

Sighting the fugitive slipping along the wall, the warrior grunted with satisfaction, planted his feet and cast the spear. It passed through the master of the slaves, pinning him against the tapestry. Then, noticing Mingan, the Mongol called over his shoulder—

"Lord, here is one in authority who has not fled but awaits you."

Genghis Khan entered, cast a glance about the hall, and walked over to the chair where Mingan sat. His clumsy walk—he was better accustomed to a saddle than his feet—and uncouth fur garments made him as out of place as a bear in the dwelling of a man.

Resting the end of his scabbard on the step where the executioner lay, he leaned on the wide hand-guard and studied the man in the chair, until his brows drew down and he growled—

"Mingan!"

"Aye." The Cathayan prince stood up. "I am in command of the palace, and city that you have conquered."

The opinion, evidently, that the conqueror entertained of the manner in which the city had been defended was too contemptuous for words. He spat toward the south.

"Thither went your dog of an emperor. Mingan, you are chief of the northern people. Why do you serve the dynasty of Cathay? Are you Chung-hi's man?"

"Aye, Genghis Khan. My fathers have been faithful to the dynasty, and I am not otherwise. To the utmost I strove to hinder your victory. Know that and do with me as you will."

The eyes of the chieftain gleamed with

sudden feeling, and strangely enough with satisfaction rather than anger.

"One who served another so will serve me well," he exclaimed.

Mingan pondered and shook his head a little.

"You have conquered an empire in the saddle; you can not govern it so. You know naught of Cathay, save to trample it under the hoofs of your horse; I can not stand by and see such a thing."

Saying this he fully expected the Khan to draw his sword, but the conqueror still leaned on it thoughtfully. Presently he nodded in agreement.

"*Kai*—I am a wild boar of the steppe. They call me the man-slayer, and it is a good name. Certain things I can not do, and must, at a time like this, call upon a wise man, a *magus* such as Prester John, who being dead can no longer aid me."

Whereupon, having spoken many words—a thing most unusual in him—the conqueror signed to the *gur*-khan, gave him some orders in a low tone, and beckoned to Mingan.

"Go with this man to the place whither he will lead you. There await my command and, when it comes, decide what you will do. Take this, as a token to protect you, in your Cathayan dress."

He held out the gold tablet, token of a Mongol hero, and raised his hand, dismissing Mingan.

When the two had left the audience hall, Genghis Khan turned over with his foot the jewels scattered on the step, glanced casually at the dying slave, who propped upright against the wall, gripped the shaft of the spear with both hands. He remembered, now that the work of the past months was ended, and to his satisfaction, that he was hungry. So he felt in his pockets and drew out some shreds of meat and dried milk-curds and began to munch.

Presently, catching sight of the official's chair vacated by Mingan, his lips widened in a smile and he chuckled noiselessly.

Meanwhile Mingan and his guide passed out of the city, through the cordon of Mongol guards, to where, amid lines of sleeping camels, a pavilion tent glowed with light. About it slumbering warriors, seated on the ground with the reins of the ponies in hand, looked up at their approach, but seeing the *gur*-khan, slept again. Stooping under the entrance flap, Mingan found Chepe Noyon and the Buffalo busily engaged in refreshing themselves at a well-laden table—at least Subotai was stuffing himself, while the Tiger sipped rare white wine of Yen-king, and picked at the strings of a gold lute taken from some Cathayan palace.

The two palladins started up at sight of their friend, and Mingan waited to learn how they would receive him.

"Mingan!" cried Chepe Noyon, the first to recognize him in his state dress. "What mummer's garb wear you now? *Hai*—your coming has saved us a mighty labor. We were ordered by the Khan to search Yen-king and find you within a day and night if we had to turn up the earth of the graves or the mud of the river." For the first time he noticed the white streaks in the hair of his friend and the lines about Mingan's eyes. "Ah, they say Chung-hi bedded you down in darkness. The swine! A captive we took at the river, a captain of the Liao-tung regiment told us that his prince had appeared in Cathay and had been quartered in a dungeon. His comrades of the north were disgruntled at this treatment of you, and soon left Chung-hi for their homes, therefore. But enough of this—here are the three palladins united, and our goblets are dry."

Subotai, his mild eyes shining with pleasure patted Mingan on the head and shoulders and quaffed a beaker of wine with an open throat. In Mingan's heart was a glow that came not from the wine. He was glad to be with the palladins, to stand in a wind-swept tent, listening to the sounds of the camp.

"Truly," he said gravely, "I am no longer your equal; Subotai is commander of a division and you are chief of the Keraits."

The Buffalo merely grunted, but Chepe Noyon laughed.

"Is it not honor enough, Mingan, that we used your trick to overcome the Cathayans who were numerous as fleas on a nation of dogs?"

"My trick?"

"Aye, so. But I forgot you were in gyves and fetters at the time. Why, the trick of the horse race. Genghis Khan gave to the Buffalo and me barely two *tumans* and sent us against the strongest of the Cathayan armies, so that we were beaten and forced to flee with naught but our shadows. So, he matched his weakest division against the strongest of the emperor, willing to lose that, while he and old Mukuli with the main power of the Horde bit into the weaker armies of Cathay like camels chewing a nose-cord. Thus it was that you matched ponies against the Gipsies and won."

Now Subotai folded his arms and stretched his mighty legs in front of him.

"A thought has come to me, O my friends." He paused to gather together words to express his idea. "Genghis Khan has tried each of us, in turn. The Tiger he raised to a high place in the world. He knew that Mingan's heart was divided like a broken goblet when the Horde turned against Cathay, and he was aware of the hero's flight, but stayed it not, wishing to test him—knowing that the Cathayans would meet him with dishonor. And now—what has the Khan in store for Mingan?"

A guard entered, conducting one of the councilors of the Mongols, and a tall Cathayan in quilted armor, weaponless, with the emblem of Liao-tung sewn on his shoulder, and a helmet bearing a captain's crest. At sight of Mingan, the northerner threw himself on his knees, pressed his head against the ground and joyfully craved permission to speak.

"Live for a hundred years, lord of the hills and forests. I, an unworthy captive, serving as interpreter, bear tidings from Yen-king that the grandees of Cathay, the nobles and councilors are assembling at the palace to salute the new governor chosen by Genghis Khan. Attend, O Bright One, prince of our race, for the northern provinces have need of your wisdom."

At this the Mongol stepped forward and confronted Mingan.

"By order of Genghis Khan—chief of chiefs, lord of the men of the earth—you, Ye Lui Kutsai Mingan, are appointed governor of Cathay, under the Khan. Do you accept or refuse?"

Mingan started, and looked down at his countryman of Liao-tung. Then his voice failed him, and he could only nod assent. Chepe Noyon gave a delighted shout, and announced that he would compose a new verse for his "Lament of the Doleful Officer"; Subotai threw his goblet crashing on the ground, seized the bowl of wine, and set it down empty.

As Mingan, followed by the two who had come to seek him, went forth from the tent, he heard the voice of the Tiger raised in song:

"From the gate in the north he sallied forth,
  Riding with loosened rein,
To weal or wo, where the four winds blow.
  Now he is home again.
    What could he do?—'Twas Heaven's whim!
    What could he say, a poor fellow like him?"

THE END

MEDICINE ARROW MAKER

by Frank H. Huston

LITTLE RAVEN, Arapajo Medicine Man, was famous from British Columbia to the Mexican border as the maker of the highly prized Medicine Arrows. He could command any price for a shaft of his making but never worked unless the necessity for more booze impelled him.

Descendant of a long line of famed medicine men, himself the most noted, he was an inveterate drunkard, dying finally from an attack of acute alcoholism.

His people showed their disapprobation of his habits by dragging his naked body to the place of interment, but in honor of what he had been and of the miraculous power incorporated in his arrows, performed the final rites and burial with all honors and accessories.

None of his arrows ever failed to hit dead center, a strange fact but true, and an Indian of any tribe fortunate enough to possess one was held by his less favored brethren to have been specially favored by the Great Spirit in its acquisition.

Raven hated the whites, but more than tolerated them as the only means by which he could procure the necessary Strong Water in adequate quantities.

ATMOSPHERE

by H. S. Cooper

TALKING about writers, a long time ago a friend of the old man's in New York, named Bill Graves, sends a gazebo out to the ranch with a letter of introduction which says that the bearer of it is a magazine writer and is out to get up an article on "The Great Southwest and Its People" and will the old man put him hep to conditions and characters, etcetery, as he had never been farther west than Chicago and oblige yours truly, Bill.

Work wasn't pushing at the time, so the old man does the usual, turns this person over to me with the letter and says to follow the requests in it and see that the magazine writer gets what Bill wants him to have. Says I:

"What in the Sam Hill do I do? What am I to be to this *hombre*, valay, guide, instructor, dry-nurse—" and here he interrupts me and says:

"You'll never be that last, Charlie, as long as there's liquor within a hundred miles! Here, take this."

He peels a thick rind of bills off'n his pocket-roll and gives them to me.

"Bill Graves has always done me fine when I go East and any friend as he sends down here gets the best! You show that man everything if it takes you a month and from Colorado to Yuma! And if that don't see you and him through, you just come back for more!"

After that there wasn't any more to be said, so I said it and went out and hunted up Mister Man—and come to find out that was his name, only he spelled it with two "n's." Says I:

"The boss has tagged me to show you this Great Southwest regardless of expense. What's the first thing you want to hitch on to?"

"That which I desire primarily is 'atmosphere,' " he says.

Say, you could have waved your hand at me and knocked me down when he made that talk! He was stunted in height, maybe five-foot four or five, but he looked hearty and strong and he sure was pussy, the pussiest man I ever saw—and him a lunger! I took a look at the letter and noticed that it called him Mr. T. B. Mann and I reckoned that that was Bill Graves' delicate way of putting it, so I says:

"Well, Mr. Mann, if that's all you're after you sure have come to the right shop. We've got atmosphere to burn, twenty-four hours a day and every day in the year. If you don't get the right kind of atmosphere here on the ranch just let out a holler as to the kind you want and how much of it you want and we'll hunt Arizona over 'til we find it!"

He looked at me most queer when I said that, says he:

"What are you talking about?"

"Atmosphere, air, climate—any kind

"Atmosphere," copyright, 1923, by H. S. Cooper.

your lungs are needing; wet, dry, damp, cool, warm, hot and —— hot!"

Then he laughed and when he laughed he didn't make any outside noises, he just rumbled and gurgled inside, and his stomach shook like a jelly. First off I thought that he had one of his T. B. attacks and was for calling help, but just as I started for the door he stopped his internal earthquake motions and noises and says:

"So you took me for a person with a consumptive tendency? That really is a good one; I will have to include that in my book." And he pulls out a little pad of paper and a pencil and writes something on it. Then he says:

"My dear man, that which we writers call 'atmosphere' is the real thing about the subject on which we are writing. So far as writing an 'article' on any subject, those who are not real 'writers' can easily do so if they have an encyclopædia at hand or access to a Carnegie library. But, we *real* writers can not do that, we must get the local color—the 'atmosphere' as we call it among ourselves—and the only proper method of doing that is to go and live in the country and with the people about whom you are writing! Unluckily I am somewhat pressed for time, I have to be in New York in a fortnight and I yet have to cover Texas and Oklahoma, so it is only possible for me to spend two or three days with you in Arizona."

My aunt! He surely did hate himself didn't he? And the way he talked was the funniest you ever heard, sort of quiet and mincing and particular. After this talk of his I says to myself, well, if your mind's as pot-bellied as your body it's up to us to get a hustle on and extract some fun and some atmosphere out of the old man's money.

So, behold us the next morning in the buckboard, ambling off to the depot, it appearing that our riding hosses was a bit too "nervous and excitable" for Mr. Mann. I took him to the depot first off because I reckoned that that would be the most atmospheric place west of any place east. There was a lot of cattle shipping about that time and each bunch that came up had a few boys with them that was just spoiling to spend their mazuma and sometimes it was quite a lively place for a while.

It wasn't so startling that morning; we took in the saloons and the dance-halls and the few other joints that was open and the atmosphere in them was mostly stale tobacco, beer and whisky so, as Mann didn't drink, I took a bracer or two and we went over and sat on the hotel gallery and chatted. He was the fullest of fool questions that I ever saw; he'd ask questions about everything that came up, and I guess that his questions would have been all right in the East where they don't seem to mind their business as we do, but some of the things he asked about sort of got on my nerves, but, of course, I had to pass that over and answer him being as he was the old man's guest.

WHILE we was sitting there a stranger rode up in front, hitched his hoss and went into the hotel office. After a minute he comes out, takes a chair at the other end of the gallery, rolls himself a cigaret and then feels all over himself for a match. Says I—

"I haven't a match, mister, but I can give you a light from this pill."

With that he came over, got his light and started back to his chair and I says:

"Won't you sit in with us? We can keep one another going with a light."

And I pointed to a chair the other side of Manny—for there was something mighty queer about his looks and I wanted a closer squint at him. He took the chair and I says—

"Stranger, shake hands with Mr. Mann, and the boys around here all call me Uncle Charlie."

He didn't shake hands, but he nodded at Manny and says—

"My name's Smith."

He purred out the words quiet and smooth like a cat and something sort of woke up in my remembrance—and then it turned over and went to sleep again. But Mr. Mann was wide awake; here was a new source of atmosphere, and he started in at once to get him several lungs full—

"Is that your real name, Mr. Smith?"

"Yes."

"I am informed that many persons here in the Southwest go under another name than their own actual one."

"Some do."

"Curious custom, isn't it?"

"Very."

"I see that you wear or carry two pistols. Are you what is known as a 'two pistol' person?"

"No."

"Then, why do you carry two pistols?"

"Might lose one."

"Did you ever shoot at a person?"

"Yes. Once."

"Did you hit him?"

"No."

"What made you shoot at him?"

"He asked too many questions."

Even as green a hand as Manny understood the hint, so he stopped the catechism, pulled out his little writing pad and proceeded to make notes of the conversation. I'd been the means of filling about fifty pages of that book coming over in the buckboard and while sitting on the gallery and it certainly was chock-full of general misinformation.

So Manny says—

"I think that I will go in and write up my notes, Mr. Charlie."

And he went, and as soon as he was out of sight, Smith says—

"Friend of yours?"

The question purred out smooth, but back of it was claws, and I wasn't ready to be scratched on account of Manny unless it was necessary. I'd been sitting on fish-hooks all the time he was putting Smith through the Shorter Catechism, for you can not tell about the temper of some of these *hombres*. So I answer—

"I am his guardeen."

And with that answer Smith lost interest in both of us, he wasn't going to waste time and attention on a half-wit and his keeper. It wasn't very complimentary to Manny, but it was the safest thing that I could do for him. Bad men, like I judged Smith to be, are some superstitious about folks as are not quite right in their heads and don't often trouble them.

So I felt that if Manny got at him again with his fool questions that he wouldn't come to any harm. Smith would just about think that no one but a man as didn't have right sense would ask such questions and from Smith's manner I took it that he sure would fill Manny full of assorted lies if he answered him at all—Manny would sure get atmosphere in chunks and gobs!

All the time Manny had been buzzing Smith I was watching that gent from between my eyelids and the more I sized him up the less I liked his looks; if he wasn't bad clean through then your Uncle Charlie had missed his guess. First off, he was too quiet, it wasn't that he was just not talkative, but his quiet was that of a moccasin, deadly quiet, all the time watching and ready to strike.

When he sat down in the chair he did it so that he could see all around him and he fixed himself so that he could draw in a second. Also, when he sat down, something hunched itself up under his left armpit and I says to myself, "Knife or a small gun."

What took me most was the way his guns hung and the fact that his right hand was white an' smooth while his left hand was sunburned and thorn-pricked and scratched. All these things roused up another one of those remembrances of mine, but this one also turned over, yawned and went to sleep again and as Joe's red-eye was taking its last effect—sleepiness—I dozed off for a minute, dreamed back twenty or more years, woke up to see Smith sort of hazy between my eyelids—and knew him at once!

Now, in those days the depot was a pretty quiet place as a rule. No killings in earnest, just a few casualties when the boys got full of tarantula juice and shot up things a bit. We never had had any holdups; there wasn't anything to hold up except the railroad construction pay car, the road being extended about twenty-five miles west of town, and that was too well guarded to make it worth while fooling with.

So it sort of got my bump of curiosity to itching to know what Alias Smith was in town for and what made him sit there so quiet and watchful, and to stop that itching I got up and rambled over to the train depot where Johnny Dix was everything from boss to roustabout and I says to him—

"Expecting any valuable shipments soon, Johnny?"

"Nope."

"No specie nor nothing?"

"No, I tell you. What you asking such fool questions for, Charlie? You know the most we ever get by express here is the C. O. D. on that plunder you're always getting from them mail-order houses in Chicago."

So I left him, but I knew from the way he talked that he had no notice of anything very valuable coming to the depot—if it had been he'd have known it and told me, because he knowed that I would not ask questions like that unless I had good reason.

Also, it was past railroad pay-day so it sure seemed that Smith wasn't there for a hold up. Then I went over to the E-lite Restaurant and had a big mug of strong coffee and that cleared out the red-eye and left my thinker get to work.

Mebbe you think that I was taking things too serious, but let me tell you, when the cold-bloodedest killer in two territories and two States which held the championship among them for pure D. killing, when such a man drops quiet and unannounced into a little burg like the depot and sits watchful and still, waiting like a cat at a mousehole, you can bet your pile that he isn't there with the intention of leading the Thursday evening prayer-meeting—not by a j-u-g-full he isn't!

Then, all of a sudden it struck me funny! Thinks I: Mr. Mann, if that *hombre* stays here and gets what he's after, you sure will have some atmosphere and there'll likely be thunder and lightning in it! First off I was for getting him to some other place. Your Uncle Charlie had Quaker ancestors and he's for peace and quietness if he has to raise high-water to get it. But, on second thoughts, if I took Manny away from there both me and him might miss a lot of fun, and I sure was plumb crazy with curiosity to know what Ananias Smith was at the depot for.

So, I moseyed around the dance-halls, saloons and gambling places to see if I could get any news and at last I struck a clue in Joe's saloon. Joe was treating "on the house" for every one that came in and that was so unusual that I made bold to ask a man I knowed, as to the why and wherefore of such reckless prodigality. Says he:

"Why, where you been, Charlie? Joe's boy—'Little Joe'—is coming through on the train tomorrow morning on his wedding trip. Don't you remember about that girl he rescued from Salthouse down there in New Mexico? Well, he's married her and he's going to call on the old folks on his way to his ranch down there."

Then a bright light broke on me and I had a complete map of the reason of the quiet visit of Mr. Salthouse Alias Smith, once the head of the biggest, baddest, boldest band of rustlers, hold-up men and cold-blooded murderers in the Big Bend section in Texas and that meant in the whole universe!

How did I know him? Well, long ago when I was quite a kid, my buddy—he's dead long ago—did something over in New Mexico as set the U. S. marshals after him. New Mexico was a territory then, and your Uncle Sam was the whole cheese and he was sure some particular relative about quite a lot of matters. He was mighty touchy as to his power and rights and dues; he'd get plumb irritable if you stepped on his corns, and Billy—that was my buddy—had trod real hard on his pet one. So it was him for Texas or Mexico, and me, being footloose, and Billy being my buddy and loving me, why I moseyed along with him.

We chose Texas first because at that time the Rim Rock section of the Big Bend was probably the most unlawfullest place in the United States, and a peace-officer, even if he was a Ranger, was a darned poor risk for life insurance if he tried to arrest a man what didn't want to be arrested. Also, Texas, not having been so long in the Union, couldn't get it out of her mind that not so long ago she had been an independent republic with a flag and President and debts and things just like the United States which had begged and bribed her to come into the Union—so Uncle Sam and his marshals did not cut as much ice in Texas as they did in the other states and territories and even a U. S. marshal walked soft and slow down in the Big Bend.

We got down to the Rio Grande when she was in flood and had to wait some days to cross as Billy had decided to get over into the land of the snake-eating eagle, the fact being that the various places we'd visited in the Big Bend was a mite too festive for quiet young fellows like us. The place where we waited was not one of the regular big crossing places, we chose it a'purpose as these other places was a bit too public. This place didn't have no name and was just a one-store-saloon-gambling-joint with a boarding-house-hotel sort of hang-out, some shacks, some Mexes and not a white woman or a decent-looking white man in the place.

There were a half-dozen other men waiting to cross, a bunch going over to rustle cattle, I should judge by their looks and what little they let drop, and the boss of them—and they sure showed that he was boss by the way they treated him—was a young lad, not over twenty or thereabouts. He would have looked good to lots of women, middle height, slender, active and graceful as a cat, smooth, purring voice when he talked—which wasn't much—and eyes as hard as nails and cold and—say, you've seen a bald eagle and the funny way his eyes slant when he looks at you, not exactly a squint but near to it? Well, that was Salthouse, regular bald eagle look.

ONE evening we was all sitting down by the river doing nothing and watching the stuff as came down the stream when a squirrel floated by on a log. One of the men shot at him and missed him and all the others tried and Mr. Squirrel dodged the splashes of the bullets and I looked at Salthouse to see if he was going to shoot and as he showed no signs of it I cut loose with a shot—a pretty long shot—and Mr. Squirrel climbed a Heavenly tree.

That brought on talk about shooting and one of the men says to Salthouse—

"Show these here gents that there's one good shot in the bunch or they'll go away thinking we're all tenderfeet—give them that rattlerdozen of yours."

That being the name in some places for shooting two guns with one hand, one gun right after the other, so that it sounds as if it was one gun with twelve ca'tridges in it. It's a regular sleight-of-hand performance and a man has to be pretty quick with his hands to do it right, but it's a trick that comes in mighty handy to know when you want every single shot to count; it's few as gets it perfect, but when they *do* you can call them "two-gun" men with truth. Lots of folks think that a "two-gun" man is one that totes two guns and can shoot one with each hand at the same time and hit his mark every time. Well, that's *one* kind, but I've never seen but two men that could do it that way and I've seen the best pistol-shots in the world.

If you're holding up a bunch or shooting into a bunch promiscuous, why two guns out at the same time has more moral—or immoral—effect than one, and I'll own up that if a man gets the draw on me with two guns it has a more persuading result than one gun would. But when you're shooting to kill and every shot has got to count, why then you shoot with your best shooting hand. And it's got to be remembered that, in them days, there was lots of times when every shot just *had* to count.

It stands to reason that no man as rides a hoss much, 'specially in rough and thorny country, can have both hands equal and quick and soople. First off, the grip of the reins and the pull of the hoss will stiffen the muscles of the riding hand and make it callous and hard. You can't ride all the time or even most of the time and wear a glove on your riding hand, so it gets sunburned and thorn-pricked and that don't tend to keep it in first-class shooting shape and you got to remember that in them days and times a man's life sometimes hung on a second's time and a little stiffness in his hands or fingers, a little slowness in motion meant that the other fellow got the drop.

You won't get much chance to see a real two-gun killer in action these days—at least not out in the country—they tell me there's a lot of them in the big cities, but they were common at the time and in the places I'm telling of. At that time when you saw a man with his right hand gloved or it was white and soople-looking and if his right hand gun hung just right for a quick and easy draw and the other gun hung different, why you either shot first on a certainty or you gave him all the room he wanted!

When the man in his bunch asked Salthouse to shoot that way I knowed at once as he must be a pretty good shot—that probably being one of the reasons that they looked up to him! He didn't seem to want to show off his shooting, but the men finally persuaded him and he stood up 'til a bunch of grass floated by with a chunk of wood in the middle of it and then he let fly. I didn't look at him; I just watched the piece of wood and timed his shots and the seventh one was a little off and it made a clear break in the "rattle."

One of the men says—

"Well, stranger, what do you think of that for shooting?"

"Pretty good shooting! The fault is in the guns."

The instant I'd got those last words out of my mouth I could have kicked myself!

"What's the 'fault' and what's the matter with the guns? They're the best in the country!"

And I knew by his voice that Salthouse wasn't pleased at that sort of criticism before his men.

I took out both my guns slow and one by one and handed them to him handles first and I says—

"Let me have both of yours?"

He gave me that bald eagle look and says—

"It's bad luck to let another man have both of your guns at once!"

"You've got both of mine, and I'm known, up in my country as a fool for luck. Let me have your guns and I'll show you what I meant by what I said."

So he handed them over and they sure were fine weapons. I twirled the magazines, hefted the guns and pointed them with both hands, balanced them on the blade of my knife, tried the pull of both trigger and hammer with the empty ca't-ridges in and with them out, sighted through the barrels, both ends—in fact I gave them the "once over" most thoroughly, all the bunch watching me most curious. Then I handed them back to him.

"They're mighty good guns," I says. "None better—but they ain't mates as close as they ought to be for a dozen rattler. They pull and balance different, they're not exactly the same shape in the handles, one shoots harder than the other but doesn't shoot as straight. Haven't you noticed a difference?"

"Yes, I'd noticed it, but I couldn't find out what made it."

"And that's what makes you change sides on them every day?"—that was a pure guess.

"Say, stranger, who might you be to know so much about guns and shooting?"

And the eagle-eyes slanted again and I knew that it was time for a showdown.

"You've got my guns and here are yours," and I laid them on the ground right at him. "What you ask about me and who I am and what makes me know so much about guns is *my* business!"

I looked him square in the face.

"Do I get my guns?"

He handed them over to me without a word, and then I says—

"Tomorrow, I'll show you how to fix those guns so that you can't tell 'em apart so far as shooting goes."

When I said that he became almost human.

The next day I fixed them up for him, showed him how to hang them to better advantage and how to change hands quicker and it certainly improved his shooting and I reckon I'm some responsible for his living so long. But I had to do it. After that fool boy-remark of mine about his shooting, my life and my Buddy's wouldn't have been worth a plugged two-bit piece if I hadn't made good on it. Well, we crossed the river next day safe and sound and what came after that doesn't matter, I just wanted to tell how I come to know Salthouse and remember him.

I hadn't thought of him for years when he was brought to my mind a year or two before that by something that happened to a friend of mine, 'Little Joe' the son of the man as kept the Golden Egg Saloon at the depot—the place where the Circle Y boys generally hung out when they got paid off. Little Joe grew up at the depot and we all liked him, but he'd never liked his father's business, so he went off to New Mexico, found him a good place for a ranch, his old man staked him and he was doing well. Also, he'd made good with some ranchman's daughter near there, her old man was as willing as she was and things looked fine for Joe.

Well, not long before that, Salthouse and his gang got to lie too heavy on the Texas stomach. There was a captain of Rangers down there that didn't give a hoot for the politicians; he got the idea somehow that he was there to clean up things and he did it to the queen's taste!

After he got through Salthouse's bunch was mostly underground, the rest was across the border and Salthouse was in New Mexico—he'd come north on the run! But, I reckon he'd figured on some such doings for he'd cached a lot of money in one of the Santa Fé banks under another name and he took that name there, bought a ranch near Little Joe's and started in to legitimate "raising" of cattle—and I guess it must have seemed pretty monotonous at first.

WHEN he happened to meet Joe's girl somewhere, and fell in love with her, for she was sure some good-looker. I'll say this for him, he did the right thing by her; he ups and asks her old man for her before he makes any serious passes at the girl. Unluckily for Salthouse the old man had just got back from Santa Fé and some one there had put him wise as to who Salthouse was.

So, just as soon as he opened his mouth about the girl the old man shows him the front door with a sawed-off shotgun to point the way out and warned him that if he ever set foot on the ranch again or so much as spoke to the girl that he'd give him the contents of the gun on sight—and the old fellow had the reputation of keeping his word.

Nothing was heard of Salthouse around that section for months. He had sold his ranch and talk had it that he had gone back to Texas—the Rangers having got into politics again. One morning, later on, the girl was riding alone further away from home than she ought to have been in that section, when Salthouse appears suddenly out of a coulée, tells her he's going to abduct her and she'd better come along quiet, takes her little popgun away from her when she pulls it on him, ties her in her saddle and rides off with her —— bent for the South.

I reckon that his particular angel had got peeved at him for having tried to live straight and love decently—anyway he sojers on his job and things happened! First, they run across one of the old man's Mexican sheep-herders in the hills, and the girl sees him first and screams out to him and Salthouse shoots him through the head, or thinks he does, and the Mex falls and stays fallen while Salthouse gags the girl. He pulls out his gun to make sure of the Mex, and his hoss shies, and they go on. Next, Little Joe hadn't seen his Dulcina for three or four days so he starts off early that morning to see if she has changed any in that time.

Next, the old man, who has been away from home a day or so, comes back and brings a couple of neighbors with him. Also, Salthouse's bullet having only grazed the Mex's temple and stunned him a bit, he comes to and, being fond of the girl, hops his burro and puts out for the ranch and gets there before they had had time to miss the girl or worry over her. So, it just happened that Mister Salthouse, instead of having a good twenty-four hour start on an unknown trail, only had three or four hours, and they knew the way he went.

And lastly—Mr. Hellion still a'sojering—there come one of these sudden rains right ahead of Salthouse, the little dry arroyas got to be unfordable torrents, it got as dark as pitch before dark time and Salthouse was waterbound. Also, he got careless in his thinker and evidently concluded that if he was waterbound and anybody was following him that they'd be in the same fix. So, as the girl was wet through, shivering and crying and he was also wet through, he stopped under the lee side of a big sheltering rock on the edge of a swollen run, lighted a fire out of the driftwood he found there, lifted the girl off the hoss, untied her, took off her gag and takes her to the fire.

After they both get warm and dry he rushes things, tells the girl that he had intended to spend the honeymoon across the Border, but that he thought it ought to begin right away and he grabbed her and commenced to make love to her. The girl was no city-baby-doll, she was country-bred, active, strong, healthy and scared to death. In the wrestle, she felt the knife he always carried under his left armpit, drew it out and let him have it in the shoulder. That sort of chilled his lovemaking, so he tied her up again, told her what he was going to do when he came back and went off to the stream to wash and bind up his cut.

Meanwhile, Little Joe and his bunch, being better acquainted with the country, had headed all the streams, followed a cut-off that saved miles and were right on top of Salthouse. The Mex's nose scented the wood-smoke of the fire when they were a long way off, for it drifted low and fast in the rain, they dismounted easy and quiet and followed the smoke-trail up to the fire just as Salthouse started back and the hellion got back on his job at once! Salthouse glimpsed some moving men by the fire-glow, slipped by them in the darkness and the first news they had of him was hearing his hoss's feet go a pounding away in the darkness and a few shots he sent toward them as he left. He didn't hit anything, but the shots scared the horses and before they could catch them again he was clean gone.

Now, with such a skunk as him, a setback like that, especially about a girl he hankered after, would rankle a long time and he'd be pretty liable to keep it in mind and get even, or try to get even, some time or other. And it just so happened that things seemed to come his way for the girl had an attack of brain-fever when she got home and was sick for some long time, so when she got so they could move her they took her East to some of her mother's kinfolks to get well and it took a long time to do that so that her folks would let her get married.

Some reporter fellow up in the East got hold of the tale about the abduction, and wrote it up in the newspapers and when it was settled that she was going to marry Joe and that they would come by the depot and make Joe's folks a visit on the way to their home ranch in New Mexico, that gets into the papers again with a rewrite of the abduction matter. Some of the Southwestern papers copied it and, I reckon, that's the way Salthouse heard of it—and laid his plans accordingly to get the girl and Joe also, if he could.

I got the situation that far into my mind and then I ran up against three double-barbed-wire fences! First: how was Salthouse going to carry through what he had in mind? Echo answers "—— if I know!" Next: how was I going to make sure of his program? Same answer. Lastly: what could I do, lone-handed, to spoil his play? And this time there was a dead silence!

BUT, old Lady Fate came along at that moment and gave me an idea. That Mex that Salthouse shot at got such a scare of him coming back and shooting him up for spoiling his nuptials that he struck off north the next day and kept on going 'til he hit the ranch and got a place as helper to Yet Hing the Chinese cook. But the Greaser's nerve had gone blooey and he tried to brace it with anything from mescal to flavoring extracts.

One day Yet Hing wanted some extract of ginger for his celebrated gingerbread and when he went to hunt it he found nothing but empty bottles in the carton and, in about a minute there was a brown streak of humanity making dust in the direction of the depot while a Chinese cook laid down a big butcher knife and talked to himself in profane laundry-ticket language.

The Mex landed at the depot and, as the newspapers say, "accepted a position" at the E-lite Restaurant as dish-washer. I'd known him at the ranch and it was him as told me all about the abduction, and I knew that he was sort of a leader among the Mexes at the depot so I hunted him up at the restaurant, took him out behind the building and told him this:

"*Hombre*, quit work at once, tell your boss that I want you for something. I'll go in and square it with him. Then get all your Mex friends and get them *pronto!* Comb this town and all around it for strangers and strange horses. Don't miss a shack or a shelter or any hiding-place here in town or for five miles around here. Report to me behind this place to-night just after dark."

I gave him a handful of silver and I added:

"And if you or any of the others waste a minute in any barroom, or with any sweetheart or stop a second anywhere to gamble I'll telegraph your friend Salthouse that you are here and to come and get you!"

That last impressed him, says he—

"*Señor*, may we stop to roll cigarets?" And I gave a gracious permission and he vanished. I'd put all this to him in good strong Mex-Spanish and, besides that, he knew *me!*

Then I hunted up Manny and found him the center of interest in the hotel, where he had started to cross-examine all the hotel folks first and had then tackled each of the boarders. The boys had tumbled to him at once and as he had told about the old man having turned him over to me and me being along with him there wasn't any rough-house, but they sure were stuffing him full of the things he wanted to know!

I'm not saying as all they told him was what Mustard used to call a "categorical statement of a fact" when he told his biggest lies, but they seemed to amuse him and he had every pocket full of notes. I stayed around with him a while, but Salthouse was too strong on my mind, so I got one or two of my friends to ride herd on Manny and see that no harm came to him and that he was kept out of mischief and then I went out on some scouting of my own, and it was a water-haul!

JESU-MARIA—that was the Mex's front name, was at the back of the E-lite to meet me at dark. He had a round dozen of his compatriots with him and the lot were some flustered over something. Says he:

"*Señor*, there is not a strange man and horse in or around the town, save one at the hotel which one of us saw, and the *señor* who is with you. But, *señor*, there are some strange white men who have recently come to work down in the railroad yard and they are living in one of the shacks down there by the piles of railroad ties. And, *señor*, they are bad men and are getting ready to do something. Some of my friends here have watched them and they know."

That gave me the information I wanted and I spread a lot of the old man's money among them and they went off pleased at me but mighty worried over something else, I know Mexes from the ground up—at least I thought that I did at that minute—and there was something up that did not please them.

I sure had the money's worth, for now two of the fences were down and I trusted to old Lady Luck to clear the other one out of the way, and she surely did—but not the way I was thinking she would! I knew what Salthouse had in mind—at least I felt certain of it. And I also felt sure as to the way he expected to do it. As I said, the railroad was being extended west and they were working on it about twenty or twenty-five miles west, right among and across a little range of stony hills that ran north and south.

They kept an extra locomotive at the depot to bring stuff to them in case they needed it and there was a telephone line to the end of the extension, so that they could call for what they wanted, for there was a camp for the men at the end of the line. Now, it would be easy for Salthouse's men, in the shack, to run that locomotive out on the main line to the west, have it stand there just below the train depot and back it up close to the train when it came in—that was often done if some one of the engineers or bosses came in on the train and wanted to get right out to the end of the line. And, it would be just as easy for the bunch to get hold of the girl, and perhaps of Joe, stand off any one that might try to interfere, get them on the engine and be off before any one really found out what was going on.

The telephone line could be cut ahead of time, they could blow up the little bridge just outside of town with dynamite and have a clear run to where they probably had horses and everything fixed for a quick get-a-way to a safe place. It looked like a plan that could be carried out with a very few men and probably Salthouse had other men along the road or at the end of the road to help along. Salthouse sure had brains, it was not the first job of the kind that he had tackled, as some of his hold-ups of trains and his bank robberies were much more complicated and risky. He must have had some man or men there to spy out the situation and get everything ready and he came in at the last minute to boss it.

But that last barb-wire fence halted me, and I couldn't get a word out of Mrs. Fate; she was off on other business. I ran up and down that fence for miles and not a place I could get over or through without snagging myself pretty badly and it sure looked as if I would have to do that regardless of consequences! I finally made up my mind that, if nothing else better come up, I'd go the next morning prepared to shoot Salthouse and as many of his gang as I could get away with—and take the consequences!

I'd known little Joe since he was knee-high to a duck; he was sandy-haired, pug-nosed, freckle-faced and bowlegged to beat the band, but he was white and straight and square, had a heart so big that it crowded his body and I wasn't going to let any dirty skunk like Salthouse hurt him or the little girl—not if it took the last drop of blood your Uncle Charlie had—for by this time I was getting to see red!

If there'd been a single soul in town to pair off with me I'd have taken Salthouse and we'd have shot up that bunch in the shack that night, but, as luck would have it there wasn't a one in the burg that I dare share my troubles with. Either they'd spill the beans at once, they'd laugh at me and tell me to "get out and sober up or the bugs would get me" or they'd flat refuse to come into it.

You see I had not a thing on Salthouse that I could prove, not a soul in town except the Mex, Jesu Maria, and me had ever seen him or could identify him and, anyway, I'm bound to confess that—to any one outside—it would sound like a fairy story or a pipe-dream! Besides all this it would not do to try any tricks on Salthouse unless you had all the aces and court-cards. The suspicious part of his mind would be wide awake, active and ready to shoot, any minute day or night, and if I put any suspicions in that mind by any actions or doings, *he* would be prepared to act and that meant one or more funerals!

There you have a bird's-eye view of the situation, and I'm free to say that it didn't please me—no, not one little bit, it didn't! That night was six months long and I never slept a wink. I didn't dare resort to liquor for I wanted all my nerve with me and a steady eye and hand with it. I spent a lot of time seeing to it that my guns, ammunition and belt was in fix for quick and certain business and as soon as the restaurant opened I had a mug of good strong coffee and meandered down to the train depot. I cast an eye at the engine and it stood in its usual place and not a soul around it—probably the men were hiding close to it.

I couldn't see a sign of Salthouse nor, as a matter of fact, of any suspicious-looking stranger, although half the town was there to welcome Little Joe and his bride. The train come in, some late as usual, Little Joe got off and was handshaked and back-thumped most to death, the bride got off and was kissed by every woman there and then they made a procession and marched up to Old Joe's house, and not a thing else doing!

You could have knocked me over with a feather! There was I all wound up to kill and be killed and things went off just like a Sunday school picnic and me left standing alone like a hitching-post, dazed, fazed, nerve all gone, jaw-dropped and fish-eyed! I was some glad that I had played a lone hand, the boys sure would have had it on me that time, and I commenced to plan how me and Manny could get out of town without my exciting his suspicions, and then I thought that maybe Salthouse had some other plan and I'd best see the thing out. Just at that minute I hear a feeble voice behind me and it says—

"Mister Charlie are you the only one left alive in town?"

For there wasn't a soul left around the train depot by then. I turned quick and here comes a procession that sure made me sit up and take notice! First comes Manny, clothes most torn off him and all bloody and dirty and holding him up was Jesu Maria and another Mex. Next comes a white man bloody all over and most all in. Next comes four white men looking the worse for wear, tied up tight and being prodded along by some more Mex's.

Last comes Salthouse feet foremost on a board, sure dead by the looks of him. Sort of instinctively I trailed after, I couldn't think of a question to ask although there were about ten thousand of them floating round in my mind—but I couldn't rope one of them. For the time being I was so locoed that I let the procession precede me like a funeral and I followed like a small boy or a dog—just tagging along! It stopped at the train depot. Johnny Dix was there; he took just one look and then he scooted across the tracks and rang the fire-alarm. It was a busted locomotive tire and you could hear it ten miles on a clear day if you hit it hard and Johnny sure did that—and in a few minutes the whole town was down there, bride, groom and all the wedding-guests.

* * *

FIRST off they thought it was a race riot or an uprising of the Mex's and were for hanging them straight. I had to butt in on that and shut it off and me being known they asked me to explain. I waved my hand at Manny and Jesu Maria, but Manny was speechless and Jesu was so nervous that his Mex-Spanish and his pidgin-English got mixed up and I had to interpret—and you can take it from me that it was some wondrous tale!

But, Manny's tale comes first, so I'll give it as I got it afterward. While I was wasting my time around town guessing and projecting, Manny had been catechising Salthouse again and that *hombre* actually stood it awhile and gave him answers, but he evidently got weary and catechism-shy and he dodged Manny all that evening or else he was at the shack with his men.

This did not suit Manny, Salthouse was his long suit on atmosphere and he laid for Salthouse the next morning, saw him slip out of the back door of the Hotel a little before train time and put for the railroad by a roundabout way. Manny follows him, catches sight of him going into the shack and so Manny goes and knocks at the front door of it, the door opens, Manny is dragged in, and given a clump on the head and tied up tight, but not 'til he has kicked one of the gang in the stomach and laid him out for a minute. So much for Manny. Now as to Jesu and his bunch!

There's no use any white man trying to read the mind of a Mex, high or low. I thought I knew 'em pretty well, but Jesu Maria put one all over me! When he was telling me about "one of us" locating a strange white man at the hotel that "one" was Jesu himself and he had recognized Salthouse at once and that accounted for his sweating and being out of breath when he and the gang were talking to me the night before.

Now, there's one thing about a Mex of the peon class, most times he's scary of his skin and life where and when a white man gets after him. But, sometimes, and dead sober, they'll be like that Texas cotton-tail rabbit—they'll tackle a bulldog and fight him to the death. Jesu had got to that stage of desperation about Salthouse, he was dead sure that that bad-man had traced him to the depot, and had come with his gang to wipe out Jesu and any bunch that he might get up and, what was more to the point, he'd got his gang of Mex's to believe the same thing and that was why they was *all* sweating and nervous the night before.

So they concluded that they'd "see Salthouse first," they crept around the Hotel that night and around the shack and got no chance for mischief, but they overheard the men in the shack say that Salthouse would be down in the morning and they also overheard a whole lot of other talk that tickled me greatly, for it proved that I had guessed Salthouse's plans to the last item.

They cached themselves among some piles of railroad ties which were close to the shack and laid for Salthouse to come in the morning. Also they had a fine plan of assault and they picked out a big switch-tie and laid it handy where they could grab it in a minute and bust the back door in, and to show how earnest they were they cut out all cigaret smoking whilst they were waiting, being afraid the smell or the light might give them away.

They saw Salthouse go into the shack in the morning and got ready for their attack, but they did not see Manny go in. Six of them lifted the tie, carried it quietly to the back door and drove the door in and nearly across the room. Salthouse must have been standing with his back close to it and got laid out cold by the blow and two or three of the others evidently got knocked down. Anyway, there was only one up when they got in and he had no chance to use his gun, so he got pretty well all the knives.

Jesu Maria took no chances with Salthouse, he gave him the knife about a dozen times from the look of his body, he said that he "desired to make certain that the *señor* was dead"—and he took the best way to do it! Manny had a narrow escape, but the ropes around him saved him. Jesu remembered having seen him with me, so he got the place of honor in the procession. There had been no shots, there wasn't time for them on the part of the besieged and the besiegers stuck to their national weapon, so that is why no one outside knew anything as to what was going on.

It sure made some story and it lost nothing in my interpreting. Some friendly soul gave Jesu a big drink of real liquor and, after that he sure made himself out as a savior of young married couples, an avenger of abducted females and a hero in Class A! He did not mention me much in his narrative and what he did say about me I censored out.

The girl identified Salthouse and that was the finishing touch, Joe and Little Joe filled the Mex's hats half-full of silver, the crowd filled 'em full and even Manny got rid to the hotel on some of the fellows' shoulders—they didn't exactly see what his play had been in the game, but he'd been in it all right and he was the only one on our side that had got at all hurt or lost any blood—so they toted him up in state, set him on the hotel gallery in a chair, gave him three cheers and a tiger and left him most confused in his mind.

On the whole I think that he was somewhat peeved because his best source of information had cashed in before he had exhausted it. He showed me his notes on Salthouse's information and I'll say this: I had done my best as an amateur liar, but Salthouse's stuff made mine look like dry statistics and I don't wonder that Manny sort of regretted him. I tended him as nurse and the next morning he says—

"I'm surely greatly obliged to you for all that you have done for me but I think that I will leave for New York in the morning if the doctor thinks that it will be wise for me to do so."

I just couldn't help it, I says—

"Have you got enough Southwest atmosphere, do you think, to write that article?"

Well, he sure surprized me, him so particular in the way he talked! He says:

"Atmosphere! ——fire, you mean! I'm here just one day, knocked down, tied up, bruised and my throat nearly cut and have to lie still and see a man stabbed to death! ATMOSPHERE? To —— with such atmosphere!"

I didn't mention the subject to him any more; for some reason or other it seemed to excite and peeve him. When I give him the news that the wounded man died natural, that the citizens had strung up the others and included Salthouse in the hanging, he wanted to leave town that night—said it would be just like the citizens to want to take him out there and show him the sights. I got his plunder from the ranch that night and he left the next morning—and I'll bet he was glad when he heard the conductor hoolo out "all abo'rd!"

My part was what these actors call a "thinking part" and a darned poor specimen of even *that!* No, sirree, I never let on, but what I'd happened into the procession sort of promisc'us and accidental and that I was as much surprized as anybody—and that was the Lord's truth! Shucks! What would I want to butt in with my story for? Salthouse and his bunch got what was long-coming to them and I reckon they was satisfied, leastwise no one has heard to the contrary.

Little Joe and his wife and his and her folks could sleep in peace, no more Salthouse nightmares, so they was satisfied. Jesu Maria and his compatriots got much honor and enough mazuma to keep them drunk and satisfied for a month. Manny got even more atmosphere than he expected—but I don't think he was really satisfied. The old man got a lot of his money back and that was more than he expected.

And as for your Uncle Charlie, he got some new slants on Mex's and the doings of Old Lady Fate when she plays a free hand and he was the most satisfiedest one of the lot after things had got settled! *Why* should I open my mouth about it? Tell me that!

NOT THREE OF A KIND

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Frank Robertson

Author of "The Mad Commanders," "Sportin' Blood," etc.

THERE was a smile on Pete Hailey's face, a half-humorous, half-sardonic grin which would be interpreted according to whether Pete was liked or disliked by the interpreter. It was the smile which Pete usually wore. To his friends, and they were many, that smile meant good-humored good fellowship. To his enemies, and they were equally many, that smile contained a sneer and a menace.

His brother Job, two years younger than he, would have deprecated it as a sign of Pete's ready propensity to get into trouble—trouble being the thing of things which Job hated.

So marked were these characteristics of the brothers that their younger brother, Jeff, had with equal derision of both nicknamed them respectively "The Apostle of Violence" and the "Apostle of Peace."

There had never actually been any bad blood between those three brothers, but the different composition of their natures was

---

"Not Three of a Kind," copyright, 1923, by Frank Robertson.

such that as a rule each one mortally detested the friends of the other two. For that reason none of them cared to work for the same outfits. All three were cow-punchers—and good ones. Pete was star twister for the J D Combined, ten miles from the town of Waterberry. Job was foreman of the Bar S, twenty-five miles from Waterberry, and southeast of the J D Combined, which was due east of town. Jeff was an unpretentious horse-wrangler for the Snake Creek outfit in the Dug-Out Hills, some thirty miles northeast of the J D Combined.

They met occasionally in town, or at various round-ups, and once in a great while one of them was moved to pay a brief visit to another one. But each one seemed to have many friends closer than either of his brothers.

To return to Pete and his smile. For thirty seconds that smile had been upon his face while he deliberated a problem. And a minute was as long as Pete ever permitted himself to make up his mind. The question was: Should he open a gate? A simple procedure in the main; but apt to lead to complications in view of the fact that the gate gave entrance to the ranch of old Juke Armstrong, and that Juke had ordered Pete Hailey to stay off of that ranch on the minimum penalty of being filled full of buck-shot.

The minute passed, and Pete swung the gate open and rode in. There was some suggestion of a hawk in his rather highly arched nose, and in the smile that was upon his lips, but not in his eyes, which were gray, keen, alert, and withal filled with the inordinate curiosity of a ten-year-old. That accounted for much of the trouble which Pete was continually getting into. He always had a boyish curiosity to see what was going to happen next. Also, he was given to a certain amount of boasting and was always ready to try to remove mountains in an effort to make good his various bluffs.

As he rode over the forbidden ground it seemed to the casual eye that he rode with the same graceful negligence with which he had approached the gate, but in reality every nerve was tensed, and he was as alert as a badgered rattlesnake. The .44 at his hip hung at precisely the angle where his hand could grip it, and his arm could flash down and back as if it were a powerful elastic band stretched to its utmost capacity. Pete was fast with a gun. He knew he was fast, and others knew it.

Yet he knew just as well that old Juke Armstrong was not to be fooled with, and there were other men on Juke's ranch as well whom he needed to watch. Chiefly one George Knapp, Juke's foreman. The worst of it was that his approach to the ranch on that side was across a half-mile of open meadow where he stood no chance to avoid being seen from the ranch-house, yet his pride urged him on and he came, riding easily in the accepted jog-trot of cowland.

Still, Pete was not entirely without caution, and he had timed his arrival at nine o'clock in the morning, an hour in which old Juke was almost certain to be irrigating and his men otherwise engaged away from the house. As it happened Pete guessed partially right. Old Juke was too busy stopping a rat-hole in the side of a canal to notice who came or went on his ranch.

George Knapp, however, had seen Pete enter. The foreman had started to ride the range that day, and he was far enough away to require a pair of field glasses to see who it was, and then his identification had been of the tall, raw-boned, bald-faced sorrel which Pete rode, rather than of Pete himself. Knapp had promptly wheeled his horse and headed for the ranch-house on a dead run.

George Knapp was a good-looking man of thirty-five or forty, but his face was far from being either pretty or friendly as he dashed toward the ranch-house. It was distorted with hate, and one good at reading faces might have detected signs of a desperate, wolfish fear in the background.

As it happened, Knapp was not alone in seeing Pete approach. From an up-stairs window, overlooking the meadow, a girl saw him coming, and her heart went into an instant flutter. She ducked instinctively away from the window, but in a moment she was back, peering cautiously through the gauzy lace curtains. A frown and a smile struggled for mastery on her face a moment, and the smile won.

She turned away from the window again, and before Pete reached the house she was amazingly transformed. There had been a dab of dough, a smudge of flour and a speck or two of dirt on her house dress. She had shifted into a clean dress at lightning speed, given a pat and a toss to her hair, dabbed a bit of powder on her nose, seized a dust-cloth and was ready to descend at the right moment to be taken entirely by surprize while engaged in her usual morning house-chores.

SHE was industriously dusting off the backs of a couple of porch chairs when Pete rode up and lolled in his saddle with lazy, indolent grace. Her start of surprize was admirably executed.

"Why—why—Pete!" she gasped.

Pete permitted himself an appreciative glance at the girl and an apprehensive one around the premises. He knew that if old Juke was to catch him there he would not hesitate to make good on his threat of buck-shot if it was possible.

"Lo, Kitty," he said genially. "Gee, kid, you don't mean to say that you kin git through a whole mornin's work, an' keep lookin' as fresh an' purty as all that."

"Oh, I haven't done all the work," she admitted demurely. Then she added with genuine apprehension, "Pete, you oughtn't to come here."

"An' leave the field clear for George Knapp!" he said. "I reckon not."

"But if dad ever catches you here he'll fly off the handle and do something terrible."

"I reckon he'll have to be movin' right fast if he gits the drop on me," Pete said complacently.

"D'ye mean to say that you'd shoot my father?" Kitty demanded crisply.

"Shore not; but I don't reckon he'll let any lead loose in my direction while I've got him covered with a .44," Pete stated. "The fact is," he went on, "as long as George Knapp hangs around here 'no admittance' signs don't go with me."

"Oh, bother George Knapp," the girl said pertly. "Do you know that dad has ordered him to stay away from me too, an' me not to look at him except when I'm pourin' his coffee, or something like that?"

"Which is more than a plenty," Pete declared, still disgruntled.

"But that don't help you any—dad would just as soon shoot you as to look at you," she pointed out.

Pete laughed good naturedly.

"The old man needs a spankin', an' if he don't act a little more reasonable he's liable to git it one of these days. When he thinks he can keep me from comin' around here, honey girl, he's just like a bull-pup tryin' to comb a grizzly."

He dismounted slowly and walked up to the girl on the porch. She glanced around nervously, as if about to beat a retreat.

"Don't hang around here," she said earnestly. "I tell you dad means business. That stunt of yours in taking those cattle away from our riders last Fall and giving them to those nesters they belonged to without charging them anything for gathering 'em sure made dad awful mad. He says you're too high-handed an' stuck on yourself. You think you can run the whole range, but he's out to show you that you can't."

"Yeah; but look here. That was pure graft. Knapp wanted to charge 'em ten dollars a head for their dogeys, an' it didn't cost a darn cent to gather 'em up with the rest in the round-up. So why hold the poor —— up just because they're too poor to hire a rider?"

"That's just your way of looking at it," she argued primly. "Dad's a cattleman, and if these nesters keep coming in and are permitted to run their cattle free there won't be any range for anybody." She was obviously quoting.

"Well, he said, "there's arguments on the nesters side of the question," but I'm not interested in that now. What I stopped in to see you about was this: I'm goin' in to Waterberry, an' I wondered if there wasn't somethin' I could bring you—a diamon' ring, say?"

Under his intense, self-possessed scrutiny the girl's face flamed.

"Oh, I—I— don't know," she worried.

Suddenly she looked past him, and her face clouded with apprehension.

It seemed that Pete did not take time to whirl. He was facing one way, and all at once he was facing the other. He had not lost his negligent, indolent manner for a moment, yet his eyes were upon George Knapp almost as soon as the girl's were. Though his hand nestled upon the handle of his gun, his face had not lost that half-impudent, half-curious grin.

Knapp's face had changed entirely from the expression he had worn while riding in. He was pleasant, even friendly.

"Hello, Peter," he called. "How's business?"

One of Pete's secret resentments was his name. It was bad enough to be called Pete, but the full name made him fighting mad;

though he was wise enough never to display resentment over such a cause, knowing that it would only make matters worse.

"My business is all right," he replied coolly.

"That so?" Knapp said, somewhat discomfited.

This Hailey fellow had a disagreeable way of always making the other fellow do the leading, and then putting him in bad.

"Thought maybe it was bein' a trifle neglected," he said with a mirthless laugh. "I reckon it's a good thing, though, that Juke ain't neglectin' his business this bright Summer mornin', or he'd be makin' things lively around here about now."

"Yeah?" Pete inquired, mildly curious, as he rolled a cigaret.

"He was steppin' along this way just now; but I'd seen you ride up here, so I overhauled him, an' told him about a dry patch of hay that needed irrigatin' a way down yonder, an' that headed him off," Knapp explained with the air of a man who has just conferred a great favor.

"Gosh, you must take a burnin' interest in yer boss's hay all of a sudden," Pete commented.

Knapp's face flushed.

"It was to keep him from makin' trouble for you," he said angrily.

As far as finesse was concerned, and what he was pleased to call "brains," Knapp considered himself immeasurably superior to this puncher, whom he considered a bluffer. It irked him sorely that Pete always seemed to make good on his bluffs, and invariably seemed to hold the better hand.

"Oh!" Pete exclaimed in mock surprize. "That's the first time I ever knew I needed anybody to take trouble off my hands. Gen'rally speakin' I'm able to take care o' myself."

"Oh, well, if I'd 'a' known you was gunnin' for the old man I'd have let him come," Knapp said, managing a somewhat uncomfortable laugh. "If it comes right down to it I reckon you'll find Juke able to take care of himself that-a-way also."

"He has got better nerve than some," Pete said laconically.

Knapp pretended to overlook the insult.

"Goin' to town?" he asked.

"Reckon so," Pete replied.

"You ain't by any chance figurin' on comin' back this way I reckon?" Knapp queried.

"Well, now, I might at that," Pete said, with a sort of challenge in his voice.

"If you do I wonder if you'll do me a little favor?"

"Well—I might," Pete said noncommittally.

"I sent my rifle down to Tony's gun-shop the other day to have it fixed an' cleaned up, an' I'd like mighty well to have it back to kill a —— timber wolf that's been sneakin' around here. If you could fetch it without any trouble I'd be much obliged."

Pete inspected the man keenly. It was a neighborly request, and nothing out of the ordinary. Only one thing seemed to make it appear that there might be some ulterior purpose behind it. Knapp knew that it would bring him back on the ranch. As if he had seen Pete catch that point the foreman hastened to say:

"Of course I wouldn't ask it, the way you an' Juke feel toward each other, unless you happen to be comin' back this way anyhow. If you do a rifle under your leg won't put you in any more danger I reckon."

Pete sensed in a vague way that there was something behind all this, some hidden subtlety. But such things were not in his line. His one reaction was that if Knapp was trying to slip something over he'd accept the challenge and meet things as they came up. Let trickery be for them that needed it; his dependence was in his fists and his gun.

"Sure I'll bring it," he said a bit defiantly.

"All right, but don't feel obligated," Knapp insisted. "If you git to thinkin' it over an' think it's too dangerous why just let it go. Or better yet, you can just lean it up against the outside of the gate, an' I'll come an' git it."

That, as Knapp very well knew, was exactly the statement that would make Pete bring the gun or die in the attempt. If it should be the latter eventuality Knapp would not be sorry. He turned on his heel and led his horse slowly toward the barn.

"You'll git your gun, an' you won't need to come to the gate after it," Pete called after him.

Then he turned to the girl.

"Well, Kitty, what about that ring? I've been wantin' to git y' one for a long time now."

"Not—not now," she said hurriedly. "And I wish you hadn't promised to bring that rifle for George. I don't want you to come here any more. I could meet you some place off the ranch, and there wouldn't be so much chance of a killing or a fight."

"Then you like me enough to be willin' to meet me places," he said, fastening at once upon the only thing that interested him.

"Yes," she said in a low voice; "but that's as far as it will ever go unless you make friends with dad. And you'll have to apologize for taking those dogeys and promise to mend your ways in order to do that."

"Like—— I will," he said bluntly. "I don't take water from no man. I always did take care of myself, an' I always will."

Later on he would probably recede from that hot-headed position and be willing to make concessions, but not now.

"Then you needn't come around me," the girl cried sharply.

Later on she, too, might be willing to compromise. But not now. There was a door at her very elbow, and before he had time to catch his breath she had whisked inside.

"—— old tree-toad," he muttered under his breath. "I'll just naturally take him across my knee till he sees reason."

Then, because he felt foolish standing there talking to himself, he turned on his heel and walked back to his horse. A moment later he was on his way to Waterberry.

II.

AMONG the men employed by Juke Armstrong was one, "Whitey" Pett, by name, who was sponsored by George Knapp. Whitey was a runtish man with mouse eyes, languid lips and the bony, dangling fingers of the typical human vulture. With the right training Whitey would have developed into a fairly successful pickpocket or a second-rate gambler; but, handicapped by his environment and an inborn mediocrity, he was under the stern necessity of eking out his slender winnings as a cheap, tin-horn gambler by pretending to be a working man long enough to get on a pay-roll.

As Pete Hailey rode away from Juke Armstrong's yard George Knapp and Whitey were in conference in the bunkhouse, where Whitey had crept as soon after going to work as possible to rest his tiring muscles.

George Knapp was a pretty shrewd judge of human nature. As long as Pete Hailey was around he knew that there was little use for him to become an active suitor for Kitty Armstrong's favor. Therefore, his policy was to make himself agreeable to the girl in a quiet way until Pete was eliminated. He intended that Pete should be eliminated, but at no cost of danger to George Knapp.

His had been the active mind which had prevailed upon old Juke to order Pete to stay off the ranch, but this had been but the beginning of his scheming. For one thing this elimination of Pete had not eliminated; that Apostle of Violence was not to be deterred by any command backed up only by a mere threat of physical force.

The fact that Pete was open as the day to read had permitted Knapp to lay part of his plan before this day when Pete had come on to the ranch in open defiance of Juke Armstrong. He had known, positively, that Pete would take such action sooner or later. And so his rifle had been left at Tony's gun-shop in Waterberry to be called for on order. Likewise, a brand new duplicate of it reposed under Knapp's bed, and only he and Whitey Pett knew of it.

"Well, Whitey," Knapp said, "I'm in a position now to put you next to that thousand dollars I promised you. Are you interested?"

"I might be at that," Whitey said, a hungry gleam coming into his eye.

"It'll only take a few hours waiting, a minute's work, an' a close mouth. Reckon you can manage it?"

"I can," Whitey declared positively. Then he added coldly, "When a man talks like that it means murder."

"Well?" Knapp challenged with equal coldness.

"Oh, nothing—only—I could use two thousand."

"Where d'ye reckon I'm goin' to git all that money?" Knapp demanded heatedly.

"Tell me who you want killed, an' I can answer you better," Whitey suggested.

"It don't make any difference to you—I'll arrange everything."

"Come clean," Whitey Pett grinned.

"Well, —— you, it's Juke Armstrong," Knapp jerked out.

"I see," Whitey said, indulging in a low whistle.

"You see what?"

"Where you come into a fine ranch, git a wife an' everything. An' where I land more than any lousy two thousand dollars!"

George Knapp flushed angrily. He had not expected Whitey to grab the whole plot in one mouthful. But that was the stake for which he was playing. Old Juke Armstrong had got into the Waterberry range country when the getting was good, and now, though he was called "old," he was only a trifle over fifty with an apparent lease of life of many, many years. Also he owned property which stood him in the clear to the extent of fifty thousand dollars. Also, and with emphasis, every cent of that property would be inherited by Kitty Armstrong as soon as old Juke's lease on life was foreclosed.

At first it had been Knapp's idea to pit Juke against Pete. But this would only solve half his problem as one of them would be left alive, and he instinctively recognized that either one of them was infinitely superior to himself in a man to man contest. What he planned was a single action that would destroy them both. Now it seemed threatened by Whitey's consummate greed.

"You can go plumb to ——," Knapp declared savagely. "I'm done with you."

"Oh, no, you hain't," Whitey grinned. "Supposin' I go an' tell what's in the wind?"

"Nobody won't believe you—an' at best you won't git a cent."

It dawned upon Whitey that he did not hold all the cards after all—and he wanted the money. His tone altered, and after a quarter of an hour's pulling and hauling terms were agreed upon.

An hour later the two men left the stableyard very discreetly. Whitey Pett slunk away through the willows which grew along a creek that flowed through the ranch, and he carried a brand new .250-3000 rifle. Knapp left the yards on horseback, apparently headed for the open range. But after a time Knapp changed his course, and when near the gate that opened the road to Waterberry he halted and concealed his horse in a thick clump of brush. Ten minutes later he joined Whitey Pett near the top of a lava knoll outside the fence and about two hundred yards from the gate.

The knoll was composed entirely of jumbled rock, criss-crossed with alternating ledges of rock, and cracks and chasms. Knapp found Whitey hunkered down in one of the crevices, well out of sight, and whiling away the time by getting the range to the gate with the rifle, which he had thrust through a triangular hole between the rocks.

"You sure you won't miss at that distance?" Knapp asked anxiously. "Everything depends on your bein' able to kill him with the first shot, an' so —— dead that he can't talk."

Whitey laughed with easy assurance.

"With this rifle I could shoot the ear off a ground-squirrel at that distance."

He fondled the gun lovingly.

"Be sure you do it," Knapp said harshly.

For several hours they waited. While Whitey pretended to doze Knapp kept a keen lookout down the road with his field-glasses. The place where Pete Hailey would first come in sight was on the crest of a ridge some five miles away. At that distance Knapp figured he would be easily able to identify the big, bald-faced sorrel which Pete rode. But Pete would be visible for only a few minutes, and then he would pass out of sight and would not appear again until he was less than a mile away.

For that reason Knapp had to be alert. He had studied the gait of the big sorrel very carefully, and he estimated that his jog trot would bring him from the crest of the ridge to the gate in about fifty minutes. Into those fifty minutes Knapp expected to crowd a lot of action.

At last, just after three o'clock, Pete Hailey topped the ridge. Even at that distance Knapp could make out the easy, nonchalant way his enemy rode. He ground his teeth with hate. A moment later Pete passed out of sight, and Knapp sprang up. He slammed his glasses into the case with a bang and turned to his confederate.

"He's comin'," he said crisply.

Whitey Pett swung himself to his knees and thrust the rifle-barrel through the aperture in the rocks that commanded a view of the gate. He took a final squint along the sights and announced himself ready.

"Be sure you don't make no blunders," Knapp cautioned.

"Don't worry none about me," Whitey grinned.

GEORGE KNAPP scrambled down off the knoll, and by his keeping in the crevices even the peak of his high hat was invisible. He hurried to his horse, and then rode furiously until he reached the ranch-house; but despite his hurry he circled the place first, and came in from the opposite direction.

He knew that old Juke always took a long noon, and he was a little afraid that he might have some difficulty finding him; but his fears proved to be unfounded. Old Juke was just leaving the ranch with his shovel across his shoulder.

"Oh, Juke," Knapp called.

Armstrong stopped and waited. "Well?" he demanded gruffly.

Knapp knew that his own days on Armstrong's ranch were numbered if Juke was permitted to live. As well as if he had been told he knew that Juke was only keeping him on until he could find an available man to take his place.

"I wasn't goin' to mention the matter," Knapp said suavely but with a hint of apology; "but I've been thinkin' the thing over, an' I decided that you'd ought to be told. That skunk, Pete Hailey, was here to see Kit this mornin.' "

The look of intense rage with which Juke received the news was intensely gratifying to Knapp.

"He was?" Armstrong quavered.

"He was. He also said when he went away that he was goin' to call again this afternoon to bring her somethin' from town. Said he'd show you how to order him where he could go, an' where he couldn't."

"By ——, I ordered that high-chinned galoot to stay off my ranch, an' I'm goin' to see he does it," Juke declared explosively.

"I wouldn't be brash if I were you," Knapp counseled gently. "Of course if you just meet him at the gate an' stop him from comin' in it'd be all right, but don't go runnin' into trouble."

"I'll run my business without your advice," Armstrong snapped.

He dropped his shovel and dashed into the house. In a minute or so he was back with a shotgun in the crook of his arm.

Knapp stole a surreptitious look at his watch and smiled.

A few minutes later, when Juke came out of the barn with his saddle-horse, Knapp was entering the kitchen where Kitty Armstrong was working. He was careful not to come to the object of his visit too quickly. Finally, however, he informed the girl that her father suspected Pete would try to come on the ranch that afternoon and had gone to head him off.

"I just mentioned it to him that Pete might come, because I knew there would be war sure if Pete took him by surprize. I thought mebbe Juke would have time to think it over, an' let it pass this once; but instead o' that he hit the trail *pronto* to head him off. I'm afraid there'll be bloodshed. It's a case of two fools comin' together. Yer dad's a fire-eatin' fool, but I'm afraid he ain't no match fer Pete."

Having explained matters, Knapp assumed a sorrowful expression.

Ordinarily the girl would have spiritedly resented Knapp's presumption in calling men fools whom she believed to be his superior in every way. Now, however, she was too worried over the possibility of a clash to bother with personalities.

"We've got to stop it," she said energetically. "Will you saddle a horse for me?"

"You bet I will," Knapp said earnestly. "I'm just as anxious to avoid trouble on this ranch as you are."

By the time the girl had thrown on her riding togs Knapp was ready with two horses. They swung on and galloped swiftly up the road toward the gate.

III

WHEN half a mile from Armstrong's gate Pete Hailey saw a man ride up to the gate at a furious gallop and stop. His eye, trained to distinguish objects at long distances, told him that this was Juke Armstrong. He knew that the ranchman's arrival was not accidental, and his pride rose as another man's gorge might rise at some disgusting object. Nothing on earth could prevail upon him to dodge the encounter.

Straight along the road he continued at the same jog trot, slouching in the saddle, his hands at rest in front of him. His eyes were tense and alert under the wide-brimmed hat, but he feigned an utter indifference, pretending to be entirely occupied by his own deep thoughts.

Old Juke sat upon a heavy-set gray horse. His shotgun was in one hand, and he brandished it as a child might brandish a stick, quite unconscious of the movement.

That nonchalant approach of Pete Hailey goaded him into an anger that was well-nigh uncontrollable. By the time Pete was within hearing-distance the rancher's face was quivering and froth was spattering his iron-gray beard.

Pete began to breathe easier as he came close enough to note the old man's condition, and he quickly made his plans. Though always ready for trouble his was not the nature of a killer, and he had no desire to force an issue that would have to be settled by a killing. On the other hand that unyielding pride of his would not permit him to do anything that might be construed as showing fear. First he would chaff the old man a bit, get him roused to the very point of committing murder; then crack a joke at his expense and pretend to give up trying to gain entrance to the ranch.

But he had no intention of giving up. He figured that Juke would hasten to the next gate to head him off there, and in the mean time he would double back to this gate, ride in, deliver the rifle to Knapp, and make his peace with Kitty. All this, he thought, should convince Juke Armstrong that he was not to be lightly ordered around as if he were a mere child.

"Don't y' come a step nigher," old Juke roared when Pete was within a couple of rods of the gate.

The brandishing gun came to a momentary halt as it was pointed directly at Pete; but it was held in one hand as a pointer, and not at the shoulder.

Pete sawed back on the reins as if suddenly surprized out of a deep reverie.

"What the —— Why, hello, Juke," he exclaimed.

"Pete Hailey, I told ye not to come on to my place," Juke howled.

"Did ya? Well, I ain't on it, am I?" Pete countered good-naturedly.

His bold, characteristic smile was on his face.

"Ya was on it this mornin,' an' yer headed here now," Juke charged.

"Look here, Juke," Pete said mildly. "If you keep on talkin' that way I'll begin to think I ain't welcome."

Juke was pitiful in his helpless anger.

"—— ye," he snarled, "ye ain't welcome. An' if I ever ketch y' on my land again I'll make y' eat so much lead y' won't be able to pack it off!"

Pete had been cautiously advancing until he was little more than a rod from the gate that separated them.

"But look here, Juke," Pete began to argue, "George Knapp asked me to bring him his rifle from town, an' of course I've got to take it to him. If I took it on by he might think I was tryin' to steal it."

"Don't arger with me," Juke snorted. "If ye've got Knapp's rifle give it to me, an' ride the other way."

Pete was really enjoying the situation. All he wanted was to show Juke that he could go wherever he chose, and it would be just as much fun to outwit him as to whip him. It occurred to him that giving Juke Knapp's rifle would help in the scheme he had planned out. He reached down and began taking the rifle out from under his leg. At that moment there came the crack of a rifle from the lava knoll.

With a vicious jerk Pete wrenched the rifle free, while he looked to see what had happened. To his amazement old Juke Armstrong was swaying in the saddle, a look of vast incredulity and astonishment on his face. Even as Pete caught the look Juke caved in and slid to the ground. As he struck he coughed, and blood spattered his whiskers. He made one convulsive effort to breathe and dropped back—dead.

Instinctively Pete looked to see whether the rifle was loaded. He jerked back the lever and saw that there was an empty cartridge in the breach. With an oath he threw it out and jerked in a loaded one from the magazine. The assassin, of course, was not in sight, and Pete's characteristic move was to see if he could run him down. He dashed up the slope of the knoll on a run until checked by a deep chasm. Then he turned his horse and picked his way around the west side, angling upward as fast as he could.

Whitey Pett had lingered just long enough to make sure that his shot had been effective; then he hurriedly thrust the new rifle into a small crevice in the rock just large enough for the rifle to go in. He picked up a small boulder and jammed it into the end of the crevice so that the rifle was entirely concealed. Then he scrambled down the east side of the knoll, scrambling from one crevice to another, but always keeping out of sight.

Once at the bottom of the knoll he made a brush run for the fence and dived into the protective bushes like a rabbit. A few minutes later he entered the road just ahead of Kitty Armstrong and George Knapp. In his hands was a hammer and a pair of wire nippers. His pockets bulged with staples. He waited for the man and woman.

Kitty stopped her horse.

"What happened, Whitey?" she demanded. "We heard a shot."

"I was fixin' fence," Whitey said breathlessly, "an' I seen the old man ridin' by —— bent. I didn't pay no 'tention till I heard that shot you did. But a minute ago I seen Pete Hailey beatin' it for the top of that lava knoll."

Kitty spurred her horse madly, and Knapp had difficulty keeping up. They speedily reached the spot where Juke Armstrong sprawled in the dirt.

"Oh, he's killed him!" the girl cried.

Involuntarily her eyes sought the top of the knoll where Whitey said Pete had been, and at that moment Pete reached the top and was outlined boldly against the sky-line.

At sight of Knapp and the girl Pete swept down off the knoll like a tornado, taking rocks and crevices with reckless abandon. The big, bald-faced sorrel was equal to it and miraculously escaped a fall. The girl was on her knees with her father's head in her lap, and Knapp was awkwardly trying to assist her, when Pete arrived. Kitty looked up at the puncher with tear-stained face, but her eyes were filled with bitterness and reproach.

"You've killed him, Pete," George Knapp said calmly.

"Killed him? ——, I didn't shoot him!" Pete asserted. "It was somebody up on the knoll."

He met the girl's horrified, contemptuous gaze and realized that he was not believed. For once his self-conceit failed him. He realized in a flash how things looked. Armstrong had ordered him to stay off his ranch. He had trespassed once that day and had boldly announced his intention of doing so again. Armstrong had met him at the very edge of his land. They had quarreled. Armstrong had been killed, and the real murderer had got completely away. Then two people had found him there. He knew it looked bad. But he was quickly made to realize that he had not surmised the worst.

"It looks mighty bad for you, Hailey," George Knapp said coolly. "Armstrong had a right to resist your enterin' his place, an' he was killed on his own land."

"I didn't kill him, I tell you," Pete said dully.

Knapp opened the gate and walked to the place where Pete's horse had stood while he talked with Juke Armstrong. He examined the tracks, then those that Pete's horse had just made.

"The print of the toe-calks on your horse's shoes show that he was standin' right there just a few minutes ago," he said.

Then he stepped a few feet away and picked up an empty cartridge.

"I reckon there ain't no use for you to deny it, Hailey," he said somberly. "This here is a shell that fits my rifle that you're carryin.' There ain't another gun like mine in this whole country."

"I jerked it out to——"

"I'll tell you something else. There were seven loaded shells in that rifle when I left it with Tony. I'll bet that now there's only six."

"—— you, you're tryin' to frame me," Pete snarled. "I'll bet you killed him yourself."

"Did I, Kit?" Knapp asked simply.

The girl raised her grief-stricken face and regarded Pete with unspeakable loathing.

"George was with me when we heard the shot," she snapped.

Just then Whitey Pett came up.

"There's the snake that killed Juke, then," Pete grated, his hand sliding for his six-shooter.

"Come off," Whitey said brazenly. "I've been fixin' fence, but I practically saw you do the shootin'."

"Kit, this is the ——est frame-up—" Pete began, but the girl chopped him off.

"You're guilty, or you wouldn't be trying to accuse everybody else of it. You'll be saying next that I did it." She turned to the two men on the ground. "Don't let him get away, boys."

Suddenly Pete was back in his native element like a fish thrown back into water. Trouble was staring him in the face, and he loved it. His six-shooter, his own favorite weapon, came out of the holster like the darting tongue of a snake.

"Try keepin' me," he said in a tone cold as ice, the gun weaving menacingly from one man to the other.

"Don't want any of my game, do y'?" he asked presently. "If it wasn't for Kitty bein' here I'd send the pair o' ye along over the hump with old Juke," he continued, paying no attention to the fact that his words could be construed as an admission of guilt.

What couldn't a skilful prosecutor do with that boastful, threatening statement in a court-room? But Pete had no intention of ever gracing a court-room—at least as a prisoner.

"Lemme tell y'," he went on in his thin, hard voice, "you've got this cooked up mighty nice, but neither you nor anybody else can take me alive. An' if I ever do git clean away you two fellers had just as well cut your own throats."

There was a note so implacable that the two threatened men involuntarily shuddered.

He started to back his horse away, but his eye chanced to rest on the case containing Knapp's field-glasses. His old, impudent, challenging grin came back on his face.

"I reckon mebbe I'll need them field-glasses a lot more than you will, Knapp," he said. "Pass 'em up here."

Knapp hesitated. To be forced to wallow in the mire of humiliation before Kitty Armstrong was a bitter dose; but the black, ominous hole in the end of the .44 that stared him in the face was all-compelling—though not more so than the gray, sardonic eyes of the Apostle of Violence. Like a man with weights on his feet he advanced and handed over the glasses.

"Thanks," Pete said mockingly, backing his horse away until he was some fifty feet distant. "Don't try any shootin,' " he said then. "Remember that I'm a movin' target, an' you're both plumb stationary—in more ways than one."

Then he whirled old Bally and dashed away; but he could not resist sending back a ringing, insolent, defiant yell.

"Well, he's got away," Knapp said.

Despite his recent discomfiture he could not quite restrain the triumph he felt. Juke was dead. Kitty would now own the property, and, for a while at least, she would not be able to get along without his services as foreman. During that time he could accomplish much. And above all Pete Hailey was definitely eliminated.

True enough, Pete's threat made him feel uncomfortable, but Pete was not going to tarry long on the Waterberry range, and if he did sure hanging awaited him unless he was killed while resisting arrest—which was more probable. Above all Pete was utterly discredited with the girl, which would not have been the case had Whitey assassinated him also.

"We mustn't let him get away," Kitty Armstrong said curtly. "A cold-blooded murderer like that mustn't be permitted to escape."

"That's right," Knapp said with an appearance of briskness, "I'll ride right into town an' notify the sheriff."

"You haven't got time for that," the girl said crisply. "Give him two hours start and we'll never catch him. Come on to the house and rouse the rest of the boys. Form a posse while I raise every ranch in the country, and the sheriff's office as well."

"The telephone! By George, I plumb forget that," Knapp exclaimed exultantly. "It bein' so plumb new thataway in this neighborhood I never once thought of it."

"Pete Hailey is almost sure to go to his own camp for a supply of ammunition, and by that time he will meet a posse no matter which way he turns," the girl said with a grim set to her mouth that reminded one greatly of old Juke Armstrong.

"We'll get him, sure's you live," Knapp agreed.

He looked at the sun, and noted with pleasure that it was still high. He also remembered that it was the twenty-first day of June—the longest day in the year. There would be many hours in which to run Pete Hailey down before nighfall, and even then night would offer the fugitive little protection, for recently the nights had been almost as light as day.

He knew, too, and it gave him the keenest sort of satisfaction, that Pete would go down fighting. There was not one chance in a thousand that he would be taken alive.

"Get on behind me," Kitty ordered Whitey Pett.

Whitey shot an inquiring glance at Knapp which meant, "What about the rifle?"

"Yes; git on—everything else can wait," Knapp said promptly. "We can't be losin' any time."

But while the posse was being raised Whitey sneaked back and removed the rifle.

IV

AS KITTY ARMSTRONG had surmised, Pete's only thought was to get to his camp, get his own rifle and a supply of ammunition. After that he would ride to the Dug-Out Hills twenty-five miles away and get a fresh horse from his brother Jeff. After that his plans were somewhat nebulous.

If he did get away he meant, some way and some time, to come back and get George Knapp and Whitey Pett; but his plans for vengeance were vague—or rather, he had so many in mind that he could decide on none of them. He was dead sure, in his own mind, that Whitey had shot Juke, and that Knapp had put him up to it. It had never occurred to him that the stake the murderers were playing for was a fifty-thousand-dollar ranch. He thought it was merely a scheme of Knapp's to beat his time with Kitty. He possessed a mind that discarded as futile and not worth while all problems that did not deal with the immediate present; which was one of the reasons why he differed so much from his two brothers. Job was continually thinking ahead and worrying about the future, while Jeff was more inclined to grope and probe into the past.

There was no one at camp when Pete arrived, nor any extra saddle-horses. As to the horses, Pete did not care. Old Bally was still comparatively fresh, and he was far and away the best horse on the range, with the possible exception of a full brother to him, a dead ringer for looks, that belonged to his brother Job.

Pete hastily stuffed his cartridge-belt full of .44 cartridges and shoved an extra box in his chaps pocket for good measure. Then he turned his attention to finding cartridges for his own .30-30 Winchester. He had occasion to congratulate himself on his habit of always having plenty of ammunition on hand, for there were eighty-four cartridges in camp. He filled the magazine and stowed the remainder about his person; then, with his rifle across his lap ready for use, he headed for the Dug-Out Hills.

Not once had he remembered the telephone, until it was brought violently to his attention when he saw ten armed men ride out from 4 Dash Ranch and spread themselves across his trail in unmistakably hostile array. He turned to the left, depending upon the speed of old Bally to get around the edge of them.

For a mile it was a real race, but old Bally's superior speed and endurance began to tell. Several bullets kicked up the dust around him harmlessly, but Pete only grinned. Then, just as he was on the verge of outflanking the posse, he came almost face to face with a posse from another ranch.

With a bitter oath he wheeled his horse in his tracks and turned the other way. A short, sharp race got him out from between the two posses, but they were hard on his heels. He was now headed southeast, in a direction which would take him just a few miles east of Juke Armstrong's ranch and toward the Bar S outfit, of which his brother Job was the foreman. The Apostle of Peace, he felt, was not an ideal man to go to for help in such an emergency, but there seemed nothing else to do.

He saw a posse coming from Armstrong's ranch, but this did not worry him greatly. For a moment he was tempted to meet it in the hope of being able to get his two enemies, but gave it up because he felt that there was a chance they would not both be with it, and he might be killed before he could get the other one.

His one chance now was to get to the Bar S and get a fresh horse, and there was only one trail to it that he could take, because there was a narrow lava bed that ran from somewhere in the Dug-Out Hills the entire length of the valley. It was from forty to fifty miles in length, and averaged a couple of miles in width. On the north side, for the entire distance, it was marked by a deep fissure some twenty to fifty feet in width and about the same in depth.

On the north side it sloped so that a man could usually get in or out without great difficulty; but on the south side was a reef of perpendicular rock that could not be scaled except in the occasional breaks which were frequently eight or ten miles apart.

It was to one of these breaks that Pete had to get if he ever reached the Bar S—and a mile before he reached it he saw still another posse coming that was sure to head him off at that point. His last chance to get help from either of his brothers was gone, and, strangely enough, he had never once thought to appeal to any of his friends who were so repugnant to Job and Jeff. And he knew that many of those so-called friends were with the various posses. By this time old Bally was white with lather, and though he still had several miles of run left in him, he was no longer capable of any great bursts of speed.

"—— the —— telephones," Pete cursed whole-heartedly.

But he had no intention of giving up. He knew the range; knew every foot of it for miles in every direction, and it all appeared in his mind clearer than any map could appear to his eyes. All he could do now, he realized, was to find some place to make a last, glorious stand. And he knew a place, some six miles away, where he could give an account of himself that would at least make him remembered in the annals of the Waterberry range. His lips curled into the old, defiant, trouble-loving, challenging smile. A glorious feeling of exultation swept through him like a drink of strong liquor.

He changed his course again, this time almost east. The lava reef, between the break which Pete had failed to reach and the one above, described a sort of horseshoe, and Pete headed directly toward the center of it. To the various posses it appeared that he had deliberately trapped himself. The two original posses had been holding far to the flank in expectation of his turning their way, and now they were in a position easily to head him off before he could reach the next trail above across the lava reef.

The one from Armstrong's and a new one were right on his heels to cut off his retreat, and the one across the reef was paralleling his course so as to intercept him if he should achieve the impossible of breaking through the other posses.

It was one man against a hundred in an open country.

In the center of the reef was a small, round basin, a mile and a half in diameter. From the lip of the volcanic cañon the basin sloped rather abruptly for nearly a half-mile. Then there was a slight rise as the floor of the basin swelled into a small hummock. On the top of this hummock, or knoll, stood a small log-cabin, the relic of some misguided citizen who had once hoped to make a homestead of the arid basin.

Just where the hummock began, between the cabin and the reef, was a pot-hole, probably an ancient buffalo wallow, which was a hundred feet in diameter across the top and perhaps forty feet deep. The hummock itself did not cover more than two acres of ground, and on the other three sides the basin sloped gradually to its rim, which was fringed with a considerable growth of scrubby quaking-aspens, service brush and chokecherry bushes.

But there was no growth of any kind within the basin except scattered bunches of waving yellow wheat-grass, and these were not dense enough to provide cover for a man.

The cabin could be seen from all sides, and although that part of the basin between the pot-hole and the lip of the lava cañon could not be seen from the other side of the reef, the cabin itself was in plain view. Therefore, the posse on the other side of the reef was able to take shelter behind the rocks and bombard the cabin at a range of half a mile. Though their bullets could not penetrate the thick logs they kept everything inside.

There was a chorus of triumphant yells when Pete led his horse into the cabin. It meant that he was trapped, with no possibility on earth of ever getting out alive. While the posse across the reef was getting entrenched behind the sheltering rocks the other four posses swept down the slopes of the basin toward the cabin.

Pete thrilled with a grim satisfaction. There were windows on two sides of the cabin, and with the barrel of his rifle he hastened to knock out some chinking between the logs on the other two sides, so that he could shoot from any side.

It took just four rifle-bullets for him to stop the rush. There was not a man there who did not know that Pete Hailey, the well-know Apostle of Violence, was a dead shot, and that he was well stocked with ammunition. His four shots had sent two horses to earth, and one man got a bullet in the shoulder, and another received a broken collar-bone. There was a hurried retreat to the shelter of the brush and timber, and the leaders of the various posses got together to discuss a siege.

For a moment Pete was dumfounded. With his usual thoughtlessness he had figured that the posses would do exactly as he would do in their place—rush in and get their man no matter what the cost. He had thought it would soon be over. He would get a dozen or so of them, and they would get him—dead. Now he began to realize just what he had let himself in for. They would keep him there until thirst drove him forth, and then he would have to surrender or be shot down like a dog without getting a single one of them.

He could not think well unless in action; so he stepped to the other side of the cabin and sent a few bullets across the reef that made the members of that posse extremely careful about showing an arm or a head when they ventured a shot at the cabin. Once he thought of making a dash for the cañon under the reef, but realized at once that it meant suicide and he was not yet ready for that.

Both when he started and when he reached the lip of the cañon he would be in plain view of that posse, and he would be in plain sight of the other posses all the time, though at long range. And should he break through by a miracle the cañon would really offer him no protection. For just a few minutes he was unutterably depressed, and then his natural, inborn optimism reasserted itself. He would stick it out some way until he could find a way to pass out in a blaze of glory, if he could not ultimately escape.

Meantime George Knapp was taking the initiative in getting the right coordination between all the posses. More than fifty men were present, and more were arriving constantly, for Kitty Armstrong had done her duty well at the telephone. Also, a man had been sent to the nearest telephone with the good tidings as soon as Pete was cornered, and naturally every one in the neighborhood wished to be in on the death scene—at safe range. And the cold-blooded murder of old Juke, well liked despite his violent temper, had caused passion to flame high. No representative of the sheriff's office had yet arrived, and Knapp was improving the time by seizing the leadership.

He had hoped that Pete would be killed during the pursuit, but he was in no great amount of despair at the turn things had taken.

"It's goin' to be light as day tonight, fellers," he told each group of men. "He ain't got neither grub nor water, so he's got to come out tomorrer sure, an' somebody'll git him before he gits a hundred yards. The only thing is to make the ring tight."

Knowing the Apostle of Violence the way it did, the posse was willing to accept Knapp's plan, and by the time a deputy sheriff arrived the circle was so arranged that the fugitive stood no possible chance to get through.

Day merged into night so gradually that there was scarcely a difference. A full, mellow moon appeared as if for the express purpose of aiding the man-hunters. It was a trifle hard to line up the rifle sights, and the undulating shadows of the wheat grass bunches as they swayed in the gentle breeze sometimes slightly resembled a man, which tended to make the men a trifle jumpy-nerved; but otherwise it was the same as day.

V

NATURALLY, one of the first places Kitty Armstrong had called up on the telephone was the sheriff's office in Waterberry. Old Zack Miller, the sheriff, was a personal friend of her father's, and she was disappointed that he was not in town. Therefore, she gave the bare details of the killing to the deputy who answered the phone, and went on calling up the surrounding ranches until she was sure there would be enough men out to prevent the murderer getting away.

She retained two of the ranch-men to help her bring her father's body to the house, and when this was accomplished the reaction came. She went into a fit of remorseful sobbing and half-wished that she had permitted Pete Hailey to get away. The fact that she really loved him made her more angry and revengeful at first than she would have been toward any other man.

But this could not last always. When word was phoned in that Pete was finally cornered in the old cabin in Lost Man Basin she became half-hysterical with dismay as her mind pictured a thousand horrors—for which she felt she was directly responsible.

Occasionally a few men would stop at the ranch to satisfy a morbid curiosity before going on to join the posse. Each man tooks pains to let her know that every able-bodied man in Waterberry, as well as from the surrounding ranches, was hastening to bring her father's slayer to justice. Somehow it did not satisfy her as it should.

The worst of it was there was not one single agency that she could invoke to undo any part of what she had accomplished. Even the sheriff could not prevent another tragedy now, for she knew well enough that Pete would never surrender.

But though the girl could not know it a force was in motion in opposition to the mob within a very few minutes after she had hung up the phone that had called it into being. That force was nothing less than family loyalty—the same thing that had caused her to forget all else in the desire to avenge her father. It seemed a feeble thing with which to oppose the efforts of a hundred enraged men, but there was a bit of determination about it which the mob spirit could never create.

One of the first men in Waterberry to hear the news was no other than Jeff Hailey, in town for supplies for the Snake Creek outfit in the Dug-Out Hills. Jeff at once slipped into the little telephone office and put in a call for the Bar S ranch.

"Heard about that killing up at Armstrong's ranch?" the girl with the head harness asked.

"No! Who got killed?" Jeff asked with a show of interest.

"Old man Armstrong of the Anchor V ranch. Fellow by the name of Pete Hailey shot him down in cold blood. They've been burning up the wires ever since calling out the men. It may be hard to get your call through," the girl explained.

"Gee, is that so," Jeff queried with interest. "If this call wasn't so danged important I'd let it go an join th' man hunt. I hate to miss bein' in on a killin'—'specially of a human bein'."

The girl missed the sarcasm.

"I wish I was a man," she said. "I bet I'd make that fellow wish he'd never shot down a poor, helpless old man."

"I bet you would," Jeff murmured gently.

"I'd tear him limb from limb," the girl vouchsafed, giving her gum an extra vicious chew. "Here's your party."

A woman's voice replied to Jeff.

"Hello, Mrs. Stacy," he called. "This is Jeff. Is the Apostle of Peace where he can be got to the phone?"

He knew very well that Mrs. Stacy would know who was meant, and that the telephone operator would not. He also surmised that the news would not have been phoned to the Bar S because it was so far out of Pete's logical trail, and also because they might fear that the Bar S, having Pete's brother as foreman, might offer him some aid.

"He ain't come in from work yet," Mrs. Stacy said doubtfully.

"Say, Mrs. Stacy, you see if you can't round him up immediate, an' have him put in a call for Jeff Smith here at the telephone office in Waterberry, right away. Please."

"Jeff—Smith?"

"Yeah," he cut in hurriedly. "Don't forgit to give him that name."

"All right. I reckon you've been up to some more of your monkey shines. Maybe you think that's all Job has to do is look after you and that hot-headed brother of yours. But I'll tell him."

She hung up, and Jeff had an uneasy moment until he made sure that the girl had attached no importance to what she had heard. The next hour, however, was an eternity to Jeff. He possessed a rather vivid imagination, and in his mind he could see every detail of the hunt for his fiery, high-strung brother. In spite of the fact that he pretended to disapprove of Pete's arrogant ways, and his propensity for getting into trouble he possessed a sneaking admiration of Pete's nerve, and he drew some satisfaction from the fact that if Pete had to go down it would be fighting.

At last the girl announced—

"Call for Jeff Smith."

Jeff leaped to the telephone booth.

"Hello. This the Apostle o' Peace?" he asked guardedly.

"What's the matter? What kind of trouble have you been gittin' into now?" Job asked irritably, letting his voice establish his identity.

"Not a thing. This is strictly business I want to talk over. But first have you heard the news? A feller by the name of Pete Hailey has gone an' killed old Juke Armstrong of the Anchor V," Jeff said, trying desperately to make his tone sound casual.

He waited in an agony of apprehension for Job to take the cue.

The Apostle of Peace rose to the occasion. His voice was as casual as Jeff's as he replied:

"Has, huh? People been expectin' it for some time, ain't they?"

"So they say," Jeff returned. "But what I wanted to see you about was to ask if you wouldn't git on your bald-faced sorrel an' ride over to meet that cattleman on his way to the Dug Out-Hills. You know he's purty violent-tempered, an' it'ud be better to have somebody meet him there. I've got some things to 'tend to at this end of the line so I can't go. But he left about three o'clock, an' you'll have to ride like —— if you head him off."

"All right," came Job's quiet voice. "I'll see what can be done. You look after things on that end—there may be something that's been overlooked."

Jeff heard the receiver click, and he paid the bill. The girl accepted the fee calmly. Quite evidently she suspected nothing out of the ordinary in the conversation she had just heard. For the first time since he had heard about the killing Jeff breathed freely. He knew that it was a slim chance that Job could help Pete any, but if there was a chance he knew Job would grasp it. The thing they both hoped to accomplish was for Job to get mistaken for Pete and draw off the posse. It was for that reason Jeff had mentioned the advisability of Job riding his bald-faced sorrel. If that failed, however, Job would have to try something else.

MEANTIME, Jeff knew that his own job was to find out what was at the bottom of the killing. He knew better than most just how hot-headed and quarrelsome Pete was, but he did not believe for a moment that Pete would stoop to a cold-blooded murder. He strolled over to the sheriff's office and there learned all the particulars as they had been phoned in by Kitty Armstrong.

"What have you fellows done?" Jeff asked.

"Sent a deputy out to take charge of things, but we're afraid the mob'll git him. Everybody's out after him," a deputy said.

"Where's Zack?" Jeff asked.

"Out o' town. Won't be back till after dark, an' maybe not till mornin'."

"I wish he was here," Jeff said wistfully. "I figure I might git him interested in provin' that Pete didn't kill Juke."

"Bein' a brother of Pete, naturally you're inclined to make excuses for him, but I'm afraid it's no good. The evidence is too strong."

"I'd like to take a look around out there," Jeff said in the same wistful tone, "but I want to have Zack with me when I do. Just so's you'll all know that I ain't plannin' anything crooked I'd like to stay right here till Zack comes. An' I can prove where I've been every minute since the word was phoned in."

"That's all right, Jeff—nobody ain't suspectin' you of anything," the deputy said.

Only a few minutes later the telephone rang, and when the deputy had listened to the voice that came over the wire he turned he'll Jeff and remarked:

"Here's bad news for y', Jeff. The boys out there have got Pete surrounded in that old cabin in Lost Man Basin. There's no chance for him to git away. If he's sensible he'll surrender an' stand trial."

Jeff cringed out of sheer pain. His first impulse was to rush out and get to Lost Man Basin as fast as possible. He quickly repressed that feeling, however, for he knew that Job was on the job somewhere and would do all that could be done. His own work was elsewhere, but he could do nothing—but think—until the arrival of the sheriff.

"Pete won't ever surrender," Jeff asserted with a bit of pride, "an' they'll know they've done something before they git him."

"I don't know—'twon't be hard to starve him out," the deputy grinned.

Jeff studied the man intently, also the other members of the sheriff's force. There was not one spark of imagination among them. There was one weak link in the chain of evidence about Pete, and Jeff ached to investigate it. But he knew, too, that its value to Pete depended upon its being investigated by officers. Should he go it alone and find any proof, it would not be accepted because he was Pete's brother. There was only one man capable of seeing that weak link even when it was pointed out, and that was Zack Miller. He must wait for Zack.

Night came, and the sheriff had not yet arrived. That meant that nothing could be done at least until morning. But had Jeff ever been given a nickname to conform with his traits it would have been "The Apostle of Patience."

VI

THOUGH two years younger than Pete, Job, the Apostle of Peace, considered himself in a way the natural guardian of his hot-headed elder brother, as well as of his somewhat frivolous younger brother. The news of Pete's trouble had hit him harder than it had Jeff, for, unlike the younger brother, he had absolutely no admiration of Pete's propensity for trouble. Also, he had been worrying over the matter ever since hearing that Juke had ordered Pete to stay off his ranch.

Yet not once did it occur to him to fail

Pete in his hour of need. Ten minutes after hearing the news from Jeff he was on his own bald-faced sorrel, ready to take the trail in an effort to get the posse on to his own trail. It was characteristic of him that he took no weapon, but that he tied to his saddle a little grub and a water-bag.

It was a long way from the Bar S to Pete's probable route to the Dug-Out Hills, but the bald-faced sorrel was capable of throwing the miles behind him at terrific speed, and Job knew how to ride in such a manner as to conserve the last bit of energy in his horse. Even so, as he neared the lava cañon his range-hardened eye told him that he was too late. Clouds of floating dust, through which he could just barely discern moving horsemen, told him that Pete was to all intents and purposes surrounded.

Job just missed being seen by the posse that was sweeping up the south side of the reef. He followed it cautiously, and was in time to see Pete reach the shelter of the cabin and turn back the first assault.

"Trapped—trapped like a —— rat," Job cursed. "Now," he muttered, "that —— pride of his will make him go the limit. If he'd had any sense he'd have surrendered an' took his chances with a trial."

Presently Job found a place of concealment for himself and horse, and from there he watched the cordon of men being drawn about the basin in a chain that seemingly could not be broken—at least by Pete alone. If there were two men besieged in there now, he thought, there might be a chance. Slowly and methodically he set to work to think out a plan that would work. He was now a man with a single idea, and that was to help Pete escape.

He left his horse concealed among the lava rocks and, taking the grub and water, and his lasso-rope, walked to the top of the reef. With little difficulty he succeeded in finding a place where the reef was only twenty feet in height. He tied one end of the lasso rope around a jutting end of rock and with the grub and water tied to his waist let himself gently down to the bottom of the cañon. Leaving the rope dangling, he proceeded up the gorge, keeping well under the shelter of the reef, until he was exactly beneath the posse that was bombarding the cabin from the shelter of the masses of boulders above the reef.

He could hear their voices clearly as they shouted to each other—some of them were not three rods from him. They talked about Pete as one already beyond the pale. They spoke laughingly of the thirst which they figured must already be tormenting him, and jokingly made bets about the number of hours he might hold out, or how far from the cabin he could get before somebody "nailed" him. With no more compassion than coyotes around a lost, crippled sheep, Job thought bitterly.

Slowly, as he listened, Job's feelings began to change. He had answered the call of family loyalty and come to Pete's assistance for that reason alone; but now he was catching the mob spirit and the lust to kill was mastering him. The desire of the civilized man to kill the killer was his. But to him the real killers, the men with murder in their hearts, were the members of the posse. He began to thrill with pride over the way Pete was holding them at bay.

But he did not lose his habitual caution. He had formed a plan, but it required considerable time, as well as a lot of daring, to work out. But the latter element did not enter into Job's calculations. He had to get into that cabin with Pete, and that was all there was to it.

There was no one between him and Pete because the top of the reef commanded a much better view of the cabin than the other lip of the cañon, and the protection was much better. The slight difference in distance was immaterial. But the moment Job attempted to go over the lip of the cañon he would be recognized, and that would spoil everything, even if he was able to get over the top in safety. He would only have to crawl a rod before he would be screened from the men on the reef by the natural slope of the basin, but in the glare of sunlight it was scarcely possible that he could get that far unrecognized.

With stoical patience he waited under the reef, listening to the coarse, brutal talk above him until the sun went down. He noted with a grim sort of satisfaction that some of the men who talked the most brutally were men whom Pete had called his best friends.

At last the night breeze began to blow, and he judged it was time to take the first step in his plan. He crawled slowly to the lip of the cañon and, throwing himself on his belly, he began to wriggle across the rod of ground where he was in sight of the posse that was less than a hundred yards away

Fortunately there were a few scattered boulders there, and by taking a half-hour to cross the fifteen feet he was able to give a a credible imitation of one.

At last he heaved a sigh of relief as he noted, by a cautious glance back over his shoulder, that he was out of sight of this posse at least. He was, however, in full view of the rest of the ring of men surrounding the basin, though at long range. But it was part of the plan that they should see him, though not clearly enough to be able to identify him.

His real danger, now, was from Pete. That Apostle of Violence would be alert as any night-hawk, and the slightest stir that looked the least bit unnatural was sure to bring a bullet. But he continued his slow, cautious advance, trying to look as much as possible like the few, scattered, swaying bunches of wheat-grass.

At last he reached the foot of the hummock, but in the blur of moonlight he knew that it would be rank suicide to go up the slope toward the cabin. Nothing that moved, ever so slightly, could escape Pete's eagle eye at that distance. Furthermore, he wanted the posse to see him get into the cabin—if he ever did. He crawled into the pot-hole and waited until morning.

Here he was concealed from everybody, and to pass the time away he cut down bunches of the wheat-grass and plaited a sort of rude blanket out of the long, yellow blades. It was an unsightly affair, as long tufts of grass stood up like the quills on a porcupine, and it had little value as a shelter from the cool, night air.

* * *

WITHIN the cabin Pete Hailey prowled restlessly from side to side, determined that no man could sneak upon him unawares. He considered himself, for all practical purposes, as well as dead; but he vowed that he would not be killed without giving an account of himself. The chances of ultimate escape seemed to be more and more remote. In fact, the one chance that seemed to offer was that the next night might prove to be darker. If he could hold out that long he might be able to sneak away.

The log walls of the cabin afforded fairly safe protection from bullets, but he had nothing to combat the raging demon of thirst which was already beginning to torment him. For a while he had stayed it off somewhat by chewing tobacco, but at last that poor comfort was gone.

That the members of the posse were not asleep was proved when he constructed a crude dummy out of loose floor-boards, covered with his coat and hat, and shoved it out the door. It was struck by no less than three bullets. There were real marksmen out there.

The long night passed at last. In the grayish light of dawn Pete rather expected an attack. His nerves became like the strings of an overkeyed violin. But nothing happened. The sun came up, and Pete realized that he was dripping with perspiration. He laughed a hollow, mocking laugh at himself as he mopped his face—such as only a man who feels that the whole world is arrayed against him can laugh. But it did him good. The old, challenging grin, a trifle ironic, was firmly back in place. Nor had he relaxed a fraction of his vigilance.

Suddenly, as he peeped through his loophole in the north end of the cabin, he saw a human head emerge from the pot-hole northeast of the cabin. It was about three hundred yards distant—too far away for a revolver shot. He shoved the barrel of his rifle cautiously through the crack between the logs where he had knocked out the chinking, and drew a bead on the slowly rising head. At the very moment when the added weight of a finger would have forever terminated the career of the Apostle of Peace, Pete's trigger-finger was checked. The perfect familiarity which brothers acquire with each other's slightest movement warned Pete to wait. A moment later he saw who it was.

"Job, by all that's unreasonable!" he ejaculated.

He saw that Job was making furtive signs to him which he could not make out. He withdrew the rifle and applied Knapp's field-glasses to the crack. Then he understood the signs. He went to the other side of the cabin and commenced whanging away at the posse across the reef. A wave of jubilation swept over him. He was no longer friendless and alone.

Meantime Job was crawling slowly and cautiously toward the cabin. He had not gone a rod before some member of the posse saw him. Swiftly the word ran around the circle of men that some fellow was trying to sneak in on Pete

Hailey and catch him unaware.

The deputy sheriff who had assumed command of all the posses quickly passed the order to begin a lively fire upon the cabin from the south, east and west to cover his advance. Men had been coming up to join in the siege at all hours, so no count of the men had ever been made. No one doubted for a moment that it was some dare-devil working for the glory of killing Pete.

To the posse it appeared that the stranger's plan might succeed. Bunch after bunch of wheat-grass he reached in seeming safety. At last he was within twenty feet of the cabin. Now, it appeared to the posse, was the critical time. Obviously he was going to make a rush for the door, and so the firing from that side had to cease. Those who could see him almost ceased to breathe as they saw him crouch, ready to run. He headed toward the door with tremendous bounds.

"By ——, he's going to make it," the deputy sheriff exclaimed as the stranger reached the door.

But the next moment he let out a groan as the unknown suddenly threw up both hands and staggered back a few steps. Then, with both hands high in the air and head bowed with humiliation, the apparent seeker after glory slowly entered the cabin.

"The —— fool. He mighta knowed he couldn't surprize Pete Hailey!" the deputy declared angrily.

A few minutes later he had occasion for further remarks. The same man, apparently, who had just been made a prisoner, marched out of the door. He wore the same yellow shirt and wide-rimmed white felt hat, which was pulled well down over his face. Pete's shirt was crimson-colored, and his hat was a brown beaver.

The prisoner walked out to the nearest bunch of wheat-grass and, kneeling, began to cut the grass with a pocket-knife. When he had an armful he carried it back to the cabin. None who saw him doubted that he was covered by Pete's revolver every instant.

"Of all the nerve," the deputy commented admiringly. "He's makin' that poor sucker cut an' carry wheat-grass in to his horse."

He made many trips, each time getting farther and farther away from the cabin. At last he headed for a good-sized clump within a couple of rods of the pot-hole. But instead of dropping to his knees there he suddenly began to sprint for the pot-hole. An involuntary cheer went up from the rim of the basin, but each separate cheer broke off in the middle as if the cheerer had been suddenly choked. There came two short, vicious, ominous barks from a .44, and the unlucky runner threw up his arms convulsively, gave two or three lurching steps that carried him to the edge of the pot-hole and collapsed.

Those watching saw him start to roll helplessly down the steep side of the pot-hole, his body twisting helplessly around the clumps of wheat-grass as he rolled. Then he was out of sight, but imagination could easily visualize the bloody, huddled mass of flesh that had once been a man; that now weltered in gore at the bottom of the pot-hole.

"Well, that settles it," the white-faced deputy sheriff said. "I had a morsel of compassion for that bird before, but if that wasn't a cold-blooded murder then I never saw one."

Under the stress of emotion he had forgotten himself for a moment and had stepped out in sight of the cabin. There came a puff of smoke from a cabin window, and a bullet threw dust all over him. With an angry oath he sprang back under cover, and an occasional bullet from the cabin warned him that he had better stay there.

VII

SHERIFF ZACK MILLER had not intended hurrying back to Waterberry, but a telegram telling him of the murder of his old friend, Juke Armstrong, had caused him to drop everything and hurry back. So it happened that just before daylight he breezed in on his deputies in the county jail and demanded particulars of the murder.

He listened gravely while his office deputy told him the particulars. Then his eyes roamed to Jeff Hailey, who had occupied a cot in the office.

"What have ye got his brother here for?" Zack demanded.

"He wanted to stay. Come here right after the news was phoned in so's to prove an alibi—though I don't see where he needs it none," the deputy replied.

"What's the ideer, boy?" Zack demanded gruffly.

"I want everybody to know that I ain't been near the Armstrong ranch to plant anything," Jeff said seriously. "Kit Armstrong said that Pete denied killin' Juke, an' if Pete said he didn't, he didn't; that's all. So I figure there must be somethin' to show that somebody else done it. That's why I waited for you—I want you to help me find it."

"No chance, Jeff," the sheriff said kindly. "Kitty's story proves complete that it couldn't be anybody else."

"I can convince you without leavin' this room that there's a big chance Pete didn't do it, an' if you'll go with me out there I believe we can prove it," Jeff asserted.

"I'm listenin'," Zack said noncommittally.

His deputies looked disgusted.

"My talk's for your ear alone," Jeff insisted.

"All right. Clear out o' here," Zack commanded his office force, and they disappeared.

"They say them horse-tracks show that Pete wasn't more than twenty feet from Juke when Juke was killed. Does it stand to reason that Pete would have lugged out a rifle from under his leg to shoot Juke with? Pete's favorite weapon is a six-gun, an' if he figured any on a gun-fight with Juke that's the weapon he'd have had handy. Old Juke was too much of an artist with firearms himself for Pete to take chances on usin' a rifle at that range."

"By golly, that sounds reasonable, all right," Zack admitted. "That is, knowin' Juke an' Pete the way we do. Still, the fact remains that the empty ca'tridge was found right there, an' now the doc says Juke was killed with a bullet from a .250-3000 rifle. So far's I know Knapp owns the only one in the country.

"You heard the deputy say they'd made inquiries about another one, an' couldn't hear of one. There was only one shot fired you know, so who else could 'a' done it?"

"I claim it must have been a frame-up," Jeff argued. "I don't know how that empty shell got there. It may have been an empty in the gun, an' Pete throwed it out after Juke was killed, or somebody may have throwed it there a-purpose. I claim the shot that killed Juke was fired from that lava knoll like Pete claimed it was, an' I bet we can find something there that'll prove it."

Zack Miller owed his reputation as a successful criminal catcher to the fact that he used common sense and never overlooked a bet.

"I'll go with y', Jeff, an' we'll find out. But first we'll go see Tony. If he cleaned Knapp's rifle he'll know how many shells was in it," he said.

Zack gave a few curt directions to his assistants; then he and Jeff called on the gun-maker.

"Dat gun she have seven cat-ridge in her when I feex him," Tony declared positively.

"All loaded?" the sheriff asked.

"Sure, Mike."

"Did anybody handle that gun between the time you reloaded it, and the time when Pete took it away?" Jeff asked thoughtfully.

"I t'ink nobody touch dat gun, 'cept one tam George Knapp she call for dat gun an' tak' him out mebbe ten, twent' minutes; den fetch her back an' say leave him till call for, 'cause she's done change her mind," Tony explained.

"You sure you didn't count the shells after that, Tony?" Zack Miller demanded.

"Sure, Mike! I'm done wit' dat gun when I feex her up."

There was a thoughtful look on the sheriff's face as he mounted his saddle-horse, and a confident one on Jeff's. That little investigation at Tony's, it seemed to both men, made one point perfectly clear—if Jeff's conjecture was correct, then the shell Pete ejected must have been empty, and it must have been put in the gun with malice aforethought by George Knapp.

Arrived at the gate into the Anchor V Ranch where Juke Armstrong had been killed, Zack got off his horse and measured the distances carefully. Jeff watched him silently, without taking any part.

"—— if it don't seem funny that Pete would use a rifle at that distance," Zack declared.

Then the two of them, on foot, began an inch by inch search of the lava knoll. For an hour they searched, Jeff always staying behind, determined not to nullify any discovery that might be made by leaving a suspicion that he might have tampered with it in any way.

Suddenly the sheriff gave an exclamation.

"By golly, somebody's been here," he

cried. "Look at them there cigaret butts!"

There were a half-dozen butts on the rocks, conclusive proof that somebody had been in that spot for some time. Jeff restrained his impulse to leap into the crevice where the sheriff stood and look for something else. The sheriff was slow in his movements, but if there were other clues he would find them.

Old Zack kneeled down and put his eye to a small aperature in the rocks. When he arose his face was grim.

"This hole commands a view of the gate," he said. "A man could kneel right here an' plunk a man at the gate without bein' seen."

Then he began a more careful search about his feet. Presently he uttered another exclamation, and kneeling, fished an empty cartridge out of a small crack in the rocks after considerable difficulty. It fitted a .250-3000 rifle.

"Youngster," the sheriff said slowly, "you've saved your brother's hide—'less'n he's already got it punctured. When the murderer ejected that shell it landed in this crack in the lavas, an' he either couldn't find it, or it was too much trouble to dig out."

"The question is—who done the shootin'?" Jeff asked.

The sheriff's face fell.

"I was a-thinkin' it was George Knapp; but it couldn't have been him. He's got his alibi. I guess this don't even start to clear Pete."

"Juke was killed by somebody actin' for Knapp," Jeff insisted steadily. "My guess is it's Whitey Pett."

"Mine too," the sheriff said glumly, "but we ain't got a thing to prove it. All we can do for Pete is to try to prove a doubt, but it won't go far with a jury o' cattlemen."

"Then we ain't done nothin'," Jeff said bitterly. "Unless Pete knows he's plumb cleared he won't come out. He'd rather go down fightin' than face a jury."

"Well, we ain't got a thing to hang it on to either Knapp or Whitey," said Zack. "Reckon y' want to ride over to see whether they've got Pete yet or not?"

"Sure," Jeff said sharply.

"Lemme warn ye—don't show yer hand, or make any fool breaks."

"All right. But listen. You've got to make them two fellers confess," Jeff said.

"Can't be done," the sheriff said. "If they're guilty they've got too good a hand to weaken. They'll stand pat. You watch."

"I gotta scheme," Jeff said humbly. And as they rode he told what it was.

THEY rode up to a bunch of men who were watching the cabin from a fringe of timber on the west side of the basin. Here they found not only the deputy sheriff, who ostensibly represented the majesty of the law, but George Knapp and Whitey Pett as well. It was evident that something exciting had just happened.

"Well, boys, how's it goin'?" Zack asked by way of greeting.

"Zack, we've just seen one of the coldest-blooded murders ever pulled off," George Knapp declared vehemently.

Zack ignored Knapp and looked to his deputy for particulars.

"Some fool guy tried to crawl in there alone to nab Hailey, an' Pete got the drop on 'im. Then he made the guy come out an' cut wheat-grass for his horse; but the guy tried to make a gitaway into that pot-hole—an' Pete plugged him in the back twice."

The sheriff turned to Jeff.

"That settles the case for Pete," he said grimly. "If I don't bring him out o' there I resign my office."

Very coolly he rode out of the timber to the edge of the basin. Almost instantly a rifle-bullet from the cabin spattered into the dirt on one side of him at his horse's feet, and then another bullet dropped on the other side. The sheriff stayed long enough to complete his survey of the basin and coolly returned to his men.

"Has anybody seen anything of my brother Job?" Jeff asked Dick Plummer, the owner of the 4 Bar 4.

"No; Job ain't showed up around here—he's got too much sense to be takin' up any of Pete's troubles. Wasn't it you named him the Apostle o' Peace?" was the reply.

Jeff nodded.

"Boys," said the sheriff, "it's cloudin' up. There's a chance it'll be dark to-night, an' if it is Pete Hailey may sneak out. Besides, that poor devil in the pot-hole may not be dead yet. I'm goin' to deputize every man here, an' sometime this afternoon we're goin' in after him. If I can't git anybody to go in with me I'll go alone."

"Now yer talkin'," agreed Dick Plummer. "To handle a bunch o' men like this you got to take him when the blood's hot. They're all riled up now 'bout this killin they saw an hour or two ago. If it wasn't for that some of 'em would be sneakin' off home before this."

Men were dispatched around the circle to prepare for the proposed attempt to take the cabin by storm; but for some strange reason the sheriff himself seemed in no hurry. Instead, he called for his deputy and Dick Plummer to join him in a conference. George Knapp attempted to horn in on the conference, but the reception he received was not all what he thought it should be, and he withdrew.

Jeff Hailey, sitting alone, seemingly moody and discouraged, saw Knapp hunt up Whitey Pett and watched them in earnest conversation behind some bushes; he would have liked to listen in on their talk, but that, he knew, was impossible.

Presently the sheriff and his deputy mounted their horses and rode away, but in so doing they passed on the opposite side of the bushes from Knapp and Whitey Pett, whom they evidently had not observed. Right at that spot, however, the sheriff stopped to light his pipe, and the deputy stopped with him.

Jeff was where he could watch both parties, and he smiled as he saw Knapp and Whitey shut up like clams in an attempt to be unobserved by the sheriff. Knapp, Jeff knew, was the type of man who would never let an opportunity to eavesdrop go unused.

"It's too —— bad that Pete had to go an' shoot that guy now that we know he didn't kill Juke Armstrong," the deputy was saying as Zack lighted his pipe.

At that moment Jeff saw the two men on the other side of the bush give convulsive jerks. He smiled again. He knew that the conversation the sheriff and his deputy were having had originated in his own brain.

"Yes; but a hot-headed fool like Pete hadn't ought to be at large anyway," the sheriff said.

"But I can't see the object in not grabbin' them other two fellers right away," the deputy objected.

"Well, it's this way," the sheriff stated. "Them two trappers that heard 'em plannin' to kill Juke might git scared an' make poor witnesses on the stand. An' outside o' that we ain't got no evidence against 'em 'cept that duplicate. 250-3000 rifle, an' the empty ca'tridge that we found up on the lava knoll. After we raid the cabin I'm goin' to do a little third-degree work. I can see it in the eyes of one of 'em that he'll squeal on the other one just as soon as we tell him what we know. If he don't, of course we'll convict 'em both, though it may cost the county a lot o' money. But that one would rather go free than stand trial."

Just then it occured to the deputy that he, too, needed a smoke. He asked for the sheriff's tobacco, and began to fill his pipe. Meanwhile, he said:

"I've thought of somethin'. You say the only evidence lackin' is to explain how that empty shell come to be where Pete stood. Mebbe you're guessin' wrong. You say every shell in Knapp's rifle must have been loaded because after Tony cleaned it he wouldn't have put an empty back in. Mebbe Pete shot at a rabbit on the way out, an' forgot to throw out the empty—or mebbe somebody monkeyed with that gun between the time Tony cleaned it, an' Pete called for it."

"By golly, you may be right!" Sheriff Zack exclaimed. "We'll quiz Tony, an' if anybody's had their hands on that gun that might be interested in slippin' in an empty shell to frame up Pete Hailey we won't need no confession. I don't know whether I'll mention the matter to that one or not. Of course, if he happens to cave voluntarily before then we'll have to let him off with a light sentence."

By that time the deputy's pipe was lighted and the two men moved on. But on the other side of the bush were two frightened and amazed men, who gazed into each other's eyes with sudden, murderous suspicion.

Whitey Pett was well-nigh paralyzed with stark fear. For the moment he was incapable of thought or action, but George Knapp was sure that at the first opportunity Whitey would seek the sheriff and confess. That meant the gallows for one George Knapp. Knapp's eyes roamed about furtively for a second. Not far away was Jeff Hailey, and Jeff was watching them with a grin on his face. Jeff had come with the sheriff.

He turned in another direction, and there was Dick Plummer of the 4 Bar 4—also watching. He had seen Plummer in conference with the officers, therefore Plummer must know all that Zack and the deputy knew. Knapp felt that the moment he tried to get away he would be stopped. There seemed but one way to avoid the gallows, and he took it.

"Sheriff," he called.

Old Zack and the deputy whirled their horses, and Knapp rushed out to meet them.

"Sheriff," he said, "I heard yer talk, an' I'm goin' to come clean. I helped Whitey plan the thing that led to Juke's killin', an' I claim immunity. Them trappers misunderstood. I never meant to have Juke killed. Whitey had a grudge at Juke, an' he wanted to shoot him. He promised to only wound him, an' on that understandin' I planned it for him so's that Juke would think it was Pete Hailey done it. But this —— tin-horn went an' killed him, an' that's the God's truth."

His voice had sunk to a whine, and the words were fairly tumbling out in his haste to beat Whitey to it.

"He's a liar," Whitey Pett screamed. "He promised me fifteen hundred dollars fer killin' Juke."

"Tell the truth, Whitey," Knapp said coldly. "We're in for it, so you can't gain nothin' by lyin' about me."

For a moment Whitey glared wildly, while the idea percolated into his brain that Knapp had beaten him to it. Suddenly his hand flashed to his hip. Before Knapp could move Whitey's revolver was spitting death.

Old Zack spurred his horse madly, and the animal made a tremendous leap, its breast-bone striking Whitey squarely in the chest and bowling him over. Before the little gambler could move the deputy was on top of him, but too late to do George Knapp any good. Whitey had fired twice, and both bullets had hit the heart.

VIII

"PETE HAILEY must be purty durn near frantic with thirst by this time. We'll wait till sundown, I reckon, before we waste any more lives goin' in after him, but if he ain't come out by that time in we go."

It was Sheriff Zack Miller speaking, and it was to Dick Plummer and several other ranchers he was speaking. A number of men had heard Whitey's shots and came running. Old Zack had very wisely started his deputy to town with Whitey Pett before making explanations.

When the real truth concerning the murder of Juke Armstrong was known there was a general feeling that Whitey should be lynched, but by that time he was too far away.

And Zack had judiciously called their attention to the fact that they had all seen Pete Hailey kill a man in cold blood, and that Pete was still in the cabin—a fact that was attested to every now and then by a rifle-bullet that threw dirt on some incautious rancher or cowboy.

"It's durn tough," the sheriff went on. "It was Jeff here that dug out the truth of the killin' an' fixed up the scheme that made Knapp confess; but all he's done won't do Pete the least bit o' good 'count o' this other killin'."

"Listen, sheriff," Jeff said suddenly. "If I leave my gun, an' don't take any grub or water with me, will you let me go in there an' try to persuade Pete to give up?"

"Will we? Well, son, we shore will!" Zack said enthusiastically. "But he's apt to kill you the minute you step out in sight," he added doubtfully.

"You remember Pete took them glasses away from George Knapp," Jeff reminded. "I've got an idea that them glasses is trained on every man that steps out in sight. I've seen that bird in there miss at least six shots since I've been here, an' I know his shootin' well enough to know that he could 'a' got some of 'em if he'd 'a' wanted to."

"I figure he's missin' because he's gittin' jumpy from thirst, but if you want to try, go ahead," Zack said.

Jeff mounted his horse and rode boldly into sight. Immediately there came the bark of a rifle from the cabin and a bullet sang unpleasantly close, but Jeff rode on. There was a breathless moment followed, but no more shots. Everybody heaved a sigh of relief as it became evident that Jeff had been recognized. Straight to the cabin Jeff rode. He dismounted, walked into the cabin and did not appear for fifteen minutes. Then he came out and waved a white handkerchief—the agreed upon sign that Pete was ready to surrender.

Immediately the sheriff and the men who were with him started slowly for the cabin. Gradually, the other members of the posse recognized that there had been a surrender, and they came pouring in. Under the excitement to get there first it became a wild race near the finish, and they all arrived at practically the same time—except those on the other side of the reef, who were barred from getting across.

"It's all right is it, Jeff?" demanded the sheriff of the young puncher lounging by the door. "There won't be no double-cross?"

"No; come on in," Jeff answered mildly. "He's harmless as a suckin' dove."

The sheriff stepped inside the bullet-riddled cabin, and as many as could get in followed him. In one end of the cabin stood a frightened, bald-faced horse, unharmed because the thick walls had resisted the bullets. On a bench in the other end of the cabin sat a dejected-looking man with his face buried in his hands. At first all the sheriff could see was the well-remembered crimson shirt and brown beaver hat which Pete habitually wore.

"Well, Pete," old Zack said gruffly, "you're under arrest."

The man on the bench lifted his dejected-looking head, and the men in the cabin recoiled. The man they saw was the Apostle of Peace.

Zack Miller was the first to recover himself.

"What kind of a —— trick is this?" he demanded. "Where's Pete?"

"If he took my advice I reckon he's well into the Dug-Out Hills by this time," Job said wearily. "But bein' such a plumb natural, trouble-lovin' fool I reckon you'll find him over on the Armstrong ranch. He swore he'd make that girl over there see reason an' settle with George Knapp an' Whitey Pett before he took to the hills."

"What about that dead man in the pot-hole?" somebody shouted.

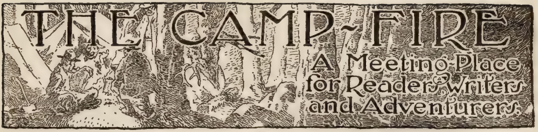
Instantly there was a wild rush down the slope, and another gasp of amazement. The pot-hole was empty. Slowly comprehension dawned upon the erstwhile mob. It was Job whom they had seen try to rush the cabin. Then he and Pete had exchanged clothes, and Job had pretended to kill his brother at the edge of the pot-hole. While Pete got away Job had held the posse at bay.

"What I want to know," blurted out Dick Plummer, "is how Pete got out o' the pot-hole without bein' seen?"

A slow grin came over the face of the Apostle of Peace.

"You see that wheat grass stubble down there?" he asked. "Well, I made a sort of a bushy blanket out o' the grass last night, an' Pete just throwed it over his head an' walked out to the coulée beneath the reef. It didn't take him an hour to git that far because I watched him with these field-glasses, an' nobody ever thought he was anything but a wheat grass—all too busy watchin' the cabin I s'pose. I left a rope to help him over the ledge, an' my horse was right on top. If he'd have had any sense he could have got clear away."

"Boys," Sheriff Zack said deliberately, addressing the members of his posse, "you kin all go home now. You're discharged. An'," he added under his breath, "whenever I need a posse again I'll just call in the three Hailey Apostles."



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

HERE is a good one on us in the office and on Albert Richard Wetjen:

Superior, Wisconsin.

Mr. Wetjen in describing a Swede seaman, states, "His jaws worked with monotonous precision as he chewed strong Copenhagen snuff, ceasing every now and then to expectorate with great care into the big cuspidor at his feet."

It is apparent that Mr. Wetjen does not know Swedes, and is certainly treading on thin ice when he attempts to thus describe the favorite Swedish pastime. No genuine Swede is ever seen moving his jaws, nor does he expectorate, other than when he is cleaning out his mouth for the purpose of substituting a fresh cargo. The used charge is generally extracted with the index finger of the right hand. The fresh chew is tucked away in the corner of his mouth, and stays there until its juices have been absorbed. There is a vast difference between snuff-chewing and tobacco-chewing. A tobacco-chewer is continually spitting and working his jaws, while a snuff-chewer does neither. I come from a long and honorable line of snuff-chewers, and know whereof I speak. My father is champion of this county now. He was the one who called Mr. Wetjen's error to my attention, for I heard him laugh uproariously, and then swear to himself. It hurt his dignity.

I wish to quote another item on page 31 of the same story. "There was a mutter of approval, especially from the Swedes. Like all their countrymen, they were ready at any time for a drink."

I can not too heartily express my agreement with Mr. Wetjen regarding this statement. A Swede can not hope to be a famous snuff-chewer unless raised on strong drink, so from birth the child is fed carefully on cognac, brandy and whisky. I was nourished along on booze in the hope of becoming a snuff-chewer to follow in the footsteps of my dad, but I switched on to Camel cigarets and so lost caste. All Swedes spend their spare moments drinking, in fact my dear mother can not go to the Swedish Baptist Church on a Sunday without taking at least a quart of moonshine in her hand-bag, and the bottle is passed rigorously before and after sermons and psalms. Children cry for it. Owing to the high price of liquor, more and more Swedish families are weaning their children from this habit, and ofttimes the dear mothers sacrifice their own share of hooch in order that poor dad may have his three fingers.—HELMER FORSLUND.

P.S.—Otherwise the story was splendid.

I'll say comrade Forslund inserted his stiletto deftly and deep into our sinful carcass. Do we apologize to the Swedes? We surely do. That word "all" had no business in the last sentence quoted and, since it slipped Mr. Wetjen, we in the office ought to have cut it out. Just slipped past it somehow without noting the injustice of the charge. Can't say I've found Swedes any more boozeful than other people. As to methods of Swede snuff-users I can't say. Never happened to know a Swede who used it, or else failed to notice the habit.

To give Mr. Wetjen a fair chance, before giving you the letter I sent it to him. He chuckled and surrendered, making, however, a reservation on the drink attitude of such Swede sailors as he himself had known. As to passing the letter to you, "Sure," he said, "give the Camp-Fire boys a laugh."

SNOWS and ketches—a few words about these particular rigs:

Brooklyn.

I see Captain Dingle seems a little in doubt about the rig of a snow. This is not surprizing, as the rig is about obsolete. I saw one in the harbor of Boston something like thirty years ago. An old seaman told me it was the first one he had seen for a long time. The rig is practically the same as a brig except that the spanker or driver or whatever the fore and aft mainsail is called is rigged to a trysail mast just abaft the mainmast instead of to the mainmast direct. I am not sure, but I think she had a standing gaff and the sail would be brailed up instead of dropping the gaff and furling gaff and sail to boom. Indeed, I am not sure whether there was a boom. I think she had the regular square mainsail, but would not assert it positively. I looked up in the Century Dictionary and found it gave the trysail mast but did not say about square mainsail.

A curious rig seems not to be mentioned in the correspondence. That is the ketch. I think this was copied from the Turks. It was like a bark (or barque) with the foremast removed and the jib stays, etc., led to the main mast. This gave a great stretch of deck forward and the rig was used for bomb vessels with a large mortar mounted forward. It is this rig which is meant when in accounts of bombardments "bombs" are mentioned as forming part of the fleet. It was a ketch, the *Intrepid*, which Somers and his gallant crew used in the attempt to blow up the fleet of one of the pirate Barbary bashaws when Somers and his crew all perished.—P. C.

SOMETHING from Robert Russell Strang concerning his story in this issue:

Leominster, Massachusetts.

I enclose a clipping from a Boston paper of yesterday's date which is self-explanatory. The point of interest lies in the fact that Cumberland is the location of my story "9 East" and the mine in which the explosion here recorded is the identical one (The Slope) of that story.

THE coal from this mine which is locally known as No. 3 is to a great extent drawn from beneath Lake Comox, two hundred yards or so from the shore of which is the slope. It is a very beautiful sheet of water surrounded by high mountains and covered with age-old cedar and spruce, not a few of the former six feet in diameter.

In this community all the unskilled labor is performed by Chinese and Japanese—hence the Chinaman of my story.

For some time in 1897, when just a boy, I "skun a mule" in this mine, and many a time my heart came up into my throat when a trickle of water from the roof would drop on the back of my neck. Always there was the fear that the lake would break into the workings, and once the rumor flared around the camp that a Government inspector, checking up the work of the mine surveyor, discovered that the latter was heading one of the levels into the lake, in the bottom of which in that vicinity the coal-seam doubtless outcropped. Anyway, development in one part of the mine was arrested.

COAL seams lie at all angles. One may be fairly level, another undulating like the billows of the ocean, still another with the sharp ups and downs of a scenic railway, and a fourth may stand on its head, in which case it is mined from beneath by stoping. But the average coal-mine of any age is blocked out for all the world like a city, the streets representing the levels and crosscuts from which the coal has been taken, and the blocks of buildings the pillars left standing to hold up the roof. When they have gone as far from the shaft as it is deemed economical to haul out of, they start drawing the pillars, which of course is cheap coal, and is a job that will probably last twenty years. This is dangerous work, and is done in this fashion: The row of props nearest the pillar is knocked out, whereupon the weight of the roof squeezes out the coal. The roof settles gradually behind the men. In thick seams these skilled miners take their lives in their hands. The great menace is the slaty rock which falls in huge slabs from the roof without the slightest warning.—ROBERT R. STRANG.

HERE'S something from Major Schauffler, Jr., of "A.A." The next time some one roars about the high cost of defense, ask him how much of the appropriation goes for actual defense and how much for things that would take the money just the same if there were no such thing as war.

National defense, 1923 model, takes just 20 cents out of every dollar of the appropriations, the Bureau of the Budget figures officially. That's 10.1 cents for the Navy and 9.9 cents for the Army. But what the average person doesn't know is that the Army's 9.9 cents includes cost of administration of the Panama Canal, river and harbor improvements and various other non-military activities. Tell this to the "pinks" who talk about our militarism; but remember it yourself. Also when you get a chance to boost aviation, upon which adequate defense will depend to an extreme degree, get behind and do your part.

This magazine does not believe in war, but so long as war exists—and heaven knows the world is not yet free from it—it believes in having this country in shape to defend itself. We don't want an army, navy and air-defense for the purpose of playing the bully among nations. The past has pretty well proved us a nation content to let others alone if they will let it alone. But they haven't always done that. Nor will they. When they won't let us alone it's very vitally up to us to be prepared to *make* them let us alone. Also, they'll be more likely to let us alone if they know we're able to protect ourselves when necessary.

The next war will be largely a war of chemistry and a war in the air. How much is being done for chemical and air development and preparation by the politicians at Washington who call themselves statesmen?

ONE of our old comrades, R. H. Stretch, E. M., takes issue with John L. Considine. Mr. Stretch is speaking from first-hand and detailed knowledge:

Seattle, Washington.

It is not a pleasant occupation to criticize a readable article, but I can not help asking myself how old Mr. John L. Considine may be, for a good portion of his article, "Underground Forests," in your issue of February 28, reads like hearsay, as his data are questionable and, while new at the business of deep mining, our methods were not so crude as he suggests. I was 26 when I struck the Comstock Lode in the Spring of '64 and made a partnership in half an hour with a man, I. E. James, whom I had never seen before. Jointly we surveyed about 80% of all the underground workings of the lode, extending from the Utah mine on the North to American Flat on the south to a depth of 3,000 feet, where the water was 170 degrees Fahrenheit. These surveys were published by the U. S. Geological surveys in 1868 under Clarence King and the early 80's under Professor Becker. The total length of underground workings was about 270 miles.

I WAS State Mineralogist of Nevada in 1866 and wrote the story of the lode for the first issue of the Government Report on the Mineral Resources of the West under Ross Browne, and drew the plans to accompany James Haines' application for patent on his V-flume which made only a very limited amount of water necessary—just enough to reduce friction, if the timber stuck the water backed up, lifted it and swept it onward. I was certainly there and had a finger in the pie!

The cave-in on the "Cholla" mine took place in 1864, and was on the Potosi outcrop which bordered the west side of "C" street, and for a month I made a daily call on the reservents to quit as the cave-in might occur at any moment. All the early shafts were lined with two-inch plank and were all vertical. The work on the Eldorado was the only incline of consequence and valueless, as all the ore bodies were vertical. The crushing in the Ophir was due to a very thick body of blue clay which expanded with terrific force as it slacked on exposure to the air.

THE trouble on the Potosi was partly from the same cause, as no timbering could resist the thrust. That on the Con-Virginia bonanza was due to the fact that an almost imperceptible sliding motion of the vein on a flattish foot wall had crushed the white quartz (100 feet wide) to sand, from which it got the name of sugar quartz. The square mining timber were standardized, for the stope, to 12 inches square, 6 feet long in the clear and shouldered to receive other sets laterally or vertically. In the Bonanza stope the ore "ran" so freely and the pressure was so great that each set as placed was filled tight with rough timber jammed in, so that practically a cubic foot of timber went in for every foot of ore extracted. In later days this mass of timber was found to be so crushed together as to be a solid block. When lumber became scarce it was cut and squared at Lake Tahoe, shot to Carson City 12 miles in less than half an hour, and thence by the V. C. and T. R.R. (very crooked and terrible rough road) to the mine by one of the 40 or 50 daily trains of the flush times.

Mr. Considine will probably remember the old Melodeon, and the lady of easy virtue who was strapped to the back of a big hog and rushed across the stage as a counter attraction to Ada Mencken playing "Mazeppa" at the opera house, and the time the boys sang "Mr. Bonner, the son of a gun, From Virginia City, he'd got to run," and all the rest of it when the Melodeon was burned. Oh! yes, I was there—shot at in the Seneca, lost two transits in shaft accidents, was lost for four hours in pitch dark on the 200-foot old deserted works of the Gould and Curry, etc.

If Mr. Considine will look up the ***Mining and Scientific Press*** of San Francisco, he may be interested in "The Comstock Lode in the Early '60's." which I wrote at the request of the Editor, T. A. Rickard.—R. H. STRETCH.

IN THIS issue begins the serial, "Fombombo," by T. S. Stribling. It is really an Off-the-Trail, not merely because of its satire, like "The Web of the Sun" and others by Mr. Stribling, but because there is in it about as much woman interest as we ever admit to our magazine and considerably more of what, for a better name in this instance, we must call sex interest.

As you know, we keep our pages clean—cleaner, if we may be self-righteous a moment, than practically all other fiction and general magazines. Clean not only of sex but of bad ethics so far as we are given to distinguish them as such. We do not feel that we are violating this rule in the case of "Fombombo," but in it we are admitting some discussion of sex matters. My own personal opinion is that if any one finds in that entirely intellectual presentation anything dirty or salacious he is a moral pervert who finds merely what he is hunting for while pretending to abhor. If discussion of sex tends to result in a clearer, saner, more logical point of view on that subject, said discussion is beneficial, not harmful.

The bite of satire and the knife-edge of merciless insistence on seeing facts and conditions without inherited or absorbed prejudice run through all the story. Sex is merely one of many subjects touched upon. The American business man in particular, if he reads with understanding, is going to find his insides probed hard and deep. So is the intolerant nationalist of either North or South America. So are a lot of other people.

The story is a story, with action and keen story interest. He who runs may read and will have a very good time doing it. But besides the story—back of it, under it, all through it—there is much besides. So much, it seems to me, that I find it difficult not to burst out with my belief in it as a very splendid accomplishment of permanent value.

IN THE following letter direct to Camp-Fire, *Field and Stream*, at my invitation, tells you about its active, organized campaign against the proposed imbecile anti-weapon laws. I know that practically all of you are against these infringements of personal freedom and of ordinary horse-sense and I hope you will join in this campaign organized by *Field and Stream*.

Field and Stream magazine has carried on an active campaign for the last year for sane revolver legislation and regulation.

OUR recent crime wave has put the country in a desperate mood. The mere fact that seemingly every one has a panacea to remedy this social disease, from the Reverend Voliva of Zion City, with his edict against all personal liberties, to the proposed bill of Senator Shields of Tennessee, in the U. S. Senate to completely prohibit the sale or transportation of the revolver in the United States, thereby disarming every law-abiding citizen in the Union, only too clearly demonstrates that in the minds of the people this crime upheaval demands immediate action. Voliva may be right—our social diseases and iniquities might be righted if we lock the doors of our theaters, dump our pipes, cigars and cigarets in the garbage-can, and then in general enlarge our prison confines to those boundaries that separate the forty-eight States from the rest of the world. On the other hand, Senator Shields might have the right method; take the pistol away from out entire citizenry and that settles the matter—no more revolvers, no more crime. Simple and easy!

OUR criminal class probably constitutes 3% of our population. That this 3% might be properly restrained and made socially unharmful, this bill would force the other 97% to give up its rights, seemingly guaranteed in the Constitution, to carry and bear arms.

It would take away a pleasure that gives thousands of our citizens healthful and socially valuable recreation. It would deprive the United States of a trained class of men who would need no training in marksmanship in time of danger. The history of our cavalry troops proves this.

But even though the passage of such a law would result in such harmful consequences, as named above, it must be admitted that if it would destroy this present condition of lawlessness and prevent a future recurrence, it should be immediately passed and vigorously enforced. The privileges of the individual must give way to the protection of life and limb. The truth of the matter is that the passage of such a law would not reduce crime; in fact, from all indications, it would only increase the probabilities of a greater crime-wave than we have ever known before. The criminal has obviously no respect for law. He would gain possession of a gun, either from the supply offered by the millions that are now in the country, or through underground sources—smuggling, dishonest gunsmiths or his own manufacture. And if not a gun, then a blackjack, sand-bag or knife would easily serve his purpose.

A CORRESPONDENT of ours reports a local gunsmith declaring that such a prohibitory law as the Shields Bill was a "damnphool law," that he hoped it would pass—he'd be independently rich. If the demand were there by the criminal for the gun, as it would be, the supply would be forthcoming. The net result of such legislation would be the disarmament to helplessness of our honest citizens that they might be preyed upon by those who never can be disarmed by legislation.

If our present laws were properly enforced, not only those regulating the sale of the pistol, but all our criminal laws; if the murderer had immediate justice dealt him, as in England; if the robber knew that he would serve full sentence, we would see not an abolition of all crime, but a large decrease in our criminal records. If we are to see crime abolished we must study the criminal and the environmental conditions surrounding him with the eyes of a scientist. The criminologist, the sociologist, the biologist and the world of scientists in general must turn their attention to him and the causes that produce his kind. Granted: This offers us no immediate panacea, but, it is a workable solution to the problem.

BELIEVING this and realizing the great danger in the prohibitory bills of those who have not gone to the bottom of this matter and separated the criminal social *causes* from the *means* by which these causes are put into effect, *Field and Stream* magazine is demanding that a few ounces of sanity be put upon the legislative scales. We are organizing the sportsmen of the country, following thousands of letters from them requesting our help and leadership, into an organization to combat such laws, and to see that proper regulatory laws are put upon the statute books of the States.

The Capper Bill now in the United States Senate more nearly approximates what we consider to be a model Bill than anything we have seen. However, it is far from perfect.

We also are demanding that our present laws be properly enforced and that the criminal be punished for his crime. If these policies were enforced we know that crime would be reduced to a minimum, and that the revolver would remain a useful weapon in the hands of the honest citizen, protecting him and his home from the criminal few, giving him, now and then, a few hours' recreation and making him a trained and useful individual in the time of a national crisis.

WE KNOW that all sportsmen will wish to help in this fight. We are counting on *Adventure* readers to help:

First: To contribute to our fund against the anti-pistol propaganda.

Second: To send letters to your local newspaper telling your side of the case, giving them *Field and Stream* literature in the matter. Write us and we will send you all the material for your needs.

Third: To get your friends to sign a petition, copies of which should be sent to your Congressman and us.

Fourth: To join the organization that *Field and Stream* is forming so that you can keep fully informed and use your individual strength where it will count the most. (There will be no dues to pay.)

Yours for freedom,
Hy. S. Watson,
Field and Stream,
25 West 45th St.
New York City.

ONE of our Camp-Fire comrades, N. B. Cotsworth, F. G. S., F. S. A., F. C. A., is secretary-treasurer of the International "Fixed-Calendar" League and has given me a copy of the booklet written by him and issued by the Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C. "The Evolution of Calendars, and How to Improve Them." There are quite a few of you who will find in it many interesting things—the pyramids, Stonehenge, time-keeping devices of many nations and ages. Also the plan for making our present Calendar more convenient.

Because the booklet mentioned the use of sticks by American Indians I sent it to Hugh Pendexter, who came across with the following, which I pass on to you.

Mr. Cotsworth's booklet can, I think, be obtained from the Pan-American Union at Washington.

Norway, Maine.

In re "calendar" only few Indian tribes used sticks to measure time, the Pima dating from the 1833 meteoric shower and perhaps being the first to use the custom. They notched their sticks. Indians, adults, could not tell their age until they had adopted the white man's method of estimating time. Their "calendar" was a loose system of indicating the seasons, varying in response to climatic conditions. Va., and Cherokee Inds., (also other southern tribes) had five seasons while the n. w. coast Indians had two. Some tribes began new time-measurement with the vernal equinox; many in the Fall (Kiowa Oct. 1, Hopi in Nov., Takulli in Jan.,) Indian n. of Mexico based their systems on the simple observations of day and night, changing moons, the seasons. Their calendar culture was meager. 24 hours was a "sleep" or "night." Years counted by "Winters" in north; by "Summers" in south. Dakota "Winter counts;" Kiowa "Summer counts." Wherever it was attempted to correlate "moons" with the "year," 12 moons usually used. But the Cree, N. Eng. tribes, and some others used 13. Creeks used 12½ moons. As a rule Indians estimated time from some outstanding event. In reviewing the past they had no "calendar" perspective. The Cherokees, among the foremost tribes in culture and the first to devise an alphabet, meant no definite period of time when they said, "in the old times," or "very old times.' It might be a decade or several generations.—Pendexter.

SOMEHOW the works got gummed up and two letters from W. C. Tuttle that should have reached you in the issues containing his stories "Powder Law" and "The Sheriff of Sundog" didn't do so. They were written to me but I think he'll not mind their being passed on to you.

It's been some time since any one wrote in saying W. C. Tuttle didn't know the West at first hand, but if that idea is still lingering around in any of you these two letters ought to jolt it rather hard.

The main theme of "Powder Law" is based on fact, and a number of the incidents are taken from life. The incident of *Black Mora's* posted land is true, although I never knew how much shooting was really done at the creek. An uncle of mine was the man who declared he was going to make a wet camp, in spite of *Mora*. (The right name was not *Mora*.) He booted the messenger, as I have had *Frenchy* boot him, and the fight took place in the morning.

THE pseudo vigilantes actually tied a grindstone to a man's neck and drowned him in the river. There were no trees handy, I think.

I have made an outlaw the leader of the pseudo vigilantes, but the acknowledged outlaws were not the ones who did the actual dirty work, in real life. Nope. The man who led them, and who profited thereby, was respectable. Yes, indeed. Perhaps he is alive to-day. At any rate, he held a high position at one time. The old timers know him.

The vigilantes really did run the sheriff out of the country—the original vigilantes, and it was one hard job to get a man to take his place. The man who did take it made the law and order bunch agree to let him shoot first and ask questions afterward. The notice was posted up in the livery stable, and enforcing it caused just about what I have written.

Wolf Butte is not overdrawn; neither are its characters. I have heard the old timers laugh over the wild days and nights in the town which I have used. The fight between *Sales* and *Mora* is taken from a real fight. Neither of the men was an outlaw. One was a professional wrestler, a whale of a man, while the other was past middle-age, weighing not over 160. I saw that punch land in the big fellow's solar plexus, and I saw the smaller man sing him to sleep with uppercuts. It was great stuff.

I hope I have not written too briefly of some of the incidents. I was but living over some of the stuff I have seen and heard about, and most of it worked fast. There was nothing glorious in gun-fights. It was a sordid business. I have never yet met an old gun-man, who would describe a gun battle. The ones who will talk are the ones who were not there at the time—the ones who went gunning in their sleep only.

The character of *Blaze Carlin* is taken from life; that is, the description. He and I shot a bear in the dark. It was a big bear—that night. The next morning it was a dead colt.—TUT.

The old vigilantes, the vigilance committees of Eastern Montana, were a terror and a disgrace. I have sat around the camp-fire and heard weird tales of their doings. But it was not the original vigilantes who disgraced their organization, but those who came after; those who resurrected the idea and used it as a cloak for their deviltry.

MY FATHER was appointed sheriff of Dawson county when the sheriff was hiding from the vigilantes, and he knows what things were like in those days. There are, or were church deacons in Montana, whose later piety can never be profuse enough to keep the devil from running his brand on them when they cash in, and there were respected, prominent men in that State, whose part in the vigilance work would make Francisco Villa look like a saint.

One character will appear slightly overdrawn—*"Black" Mora*. But I assure you that he is as near true to life as I can make him—from description. His ranch, appearance, ambitions were peculiar. He wanted to rule the country. The vigilance idea came near solving his problem. His finish will be fiction, because no one seemed to know what became of him. Perhaps there are few people who have ever heard of him. He flashed for a day, and in a day when history was vague, but he was goshawful prominent in a small way.

I have tried to describe the town of Red Deer from the descriptions of the town where I was born, as it was in the early eighties. My earliest recollection was hearing my father tell my nurse, "For ——'s sake take that kid away from the street, Kate! These cowpunchers don't care where they shoot."

DAD was sheriff then; over six feet tall, a bright-eyed, silent man, whose normal stride was four feet. He accepted the office with the understanding that he would be accountable to no man. His undersheriff was a gun-man. In this story I have used the notice which they posted in the livery-stable. It ordered all men to leave their guns with their horse or turn them over to the sheriff. There were no questions asked. The undersheriff stayed at the stable, which was in full view of the one, long hitch-rack, where another sign was posted. When any man started for the saloons, gun on hip, he was stopped. The order was repeated. It was up to him. Some tried to ignore it. They immediately lost interest in things. It took a month and much powder, but the sheriff won.

Dad was no six-shooter wizard, but no man ever lived who could beat him with a Sharps rifle or with a Winchester carbine. Doctor Carver, who, at a slightly later date, was considered the champion rifle-shot of the world, used to come West to hunt antelope with dad. He made an open statement that "Hank" Tuttle could discount any rifle shooting he had ever seen. Carver shot to entertain, while dad shot to kill.—TUT.

DEFINITE news as to the final fate of Ambrose Bierce in Mexico. If I remember correctly, the newspaper article, quoted as saying his fate was still unknown, appeared in the New York *Times*.

The Mexican News Bureau, Washington, D. C.

In the May 10th issue I note the request for information as to the fate of Ambrose Bierce, and comment regarding the matter, with the implication that it had never been cleared up.

I AM preparing a volume of "Mexican Reminiscences," covering a long residence in that country both in time of peace and of war. One of the chapters recently completed relates the story of Ambrose Bierce, derived by me from an associate who was an officer in Villa's army, was intimately acquainted with Bierce and ascertained the facts of his death, though not present thereat.

Briefly, Bierce was captured by an insurgent general named Tomas Urbina while accompanying a pack-train of arms and ammunition on the road to supply one of the Constitutionalist columns operating in opposition to himself. One Mexican and Bierce were the only prisoners taken, the others with the train making their escape. Bierce and his companion were both summarily shot and buried by the side of the road in an isolated spot near a village in the State of Nuevo Leon, in the northern portion of Mexico. In the chapter in question I give the full details as derived from an eye-witness of the affair. There can not be the least doubt that this is the true solution of the mystery that so long shrouded the affair.—G. F. WEEKS.

THIS letter from Fred F. Fleischer of our Ask Adventure staff will not be pleasant reading for those who had the idea that Talbot Mundy is a pro-British propagandist. Except, of course, as it is propaganda to tell the truth. Yes, "The Ivory Trail" did appear in *Adventure*, under the title of "On The Trail Of Tippoo Tib."

Please listen closely:

In *re:* alleged British Propaganda by our mutual friend Talbot Mundy: I do not know if his "Ivory Trail" first appeared in *Adventure*, at any rate I first read it in 1919 at Camp Funston, Kansas. It contains such a vivid description of conditions in German East, brought out in comparison with British Colonial Rule, that the layman might well mistake such realism as propaganda. Of course, you'n me know better.

NEVERTHELESS, I decided to find out for my own satisfaction if Mr. Mundy has told the uncolored truth or elaborated facts. I ordered from abroad reference books etc., and, eureka, I have found a pearl among a lot of rot.

The court scenes, as well as the cruel lashings of the blacks so vividly pictured by Mr. Mundy, are contained almost verbatim—one might take Mr. Mundy's lines as a translation of the German text—in the second volume of Dr. Max Kemmerich's "Kultur Kuriosa." It is hard to translate the title of this book, but under the heading of "German Colonial Politics" these episodes are related to have happened in the year of 1895-96. In addition to this there are several other incidents along the lines pictured by Mr. Mundy.

The proof of the pudding is this: *Primo:* Mr. Mundy knows —— well what he is writing about. *Secundo:* Mr. Mundy is telling uncolored truth. *Terzo:* If comparison of facts is propaganda, I'm John D., and you are Plinius the Younger. In other words he who can not distinguish between the fact that some author's works are lasting pictures of life and customs in foreign countries—told us as the author's eyes have seen and his mind has absorbed it—and fiction, pure and simple with invented plot, and scenes as they might have been and exist only in the "scribe's" imagination, is in my humble opinion an ass in the *n*th.

By the way, if you care to have it, I'll give you a complete list of the references which carry out the truth of Mr. Mundy's tale. They are German sources, and, believe me, the Heinies do not publish these things, unless they are quite sure they represent the *absolute, irrevocable truth.*—FLEISCHER.

BE MARKING down your favorite stories for our annual vote by readers on the best fiction published in the magazine during the year. Mark down the stories as you go along and send us the list at the end of the year. We want to print the sort of fiction you like and this is the only way in which we can find what that sort is.

FOLLOWING the Camp-Fire custom, Thomas Topham rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. As for me, I vote with him that he was competent in the instance cited.

One of our greatest of modern adventurers, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, declares that he who has an adventure is incompetent. He proves conclusively that all things should be foreseen, and then himself plunges into a series of adventures that disproves his theory.

Of course, all of us adventurers, and all who love adventure whether or not we live it, are in that class, and disagree heartily, not to say violently, with Mr. Stefansson.

So when the editor suggested that it was a time-honored custom for one who had told a story to his readers to stand up like a man and tell something of himself and his adventures, Mr. Stefansson's definition flashed across my mind and I thought: "Eh, heh, he's trying to show me up as an incompetent, but I'll get even with him. I'll just go ahead and do it, and show folks how really competent I am in the face of emergencies."

I HAVE been incompetent enough to have had my share of adventures, among which was being chased a full five miles by a bear, which bear hunters will tell you is an impossibility if they don't use stronger language, but here's my thriller:

We were camping in the beautiful Sierra Madre Mountains of California. The tent, pitched in a spot beneath trees, looked down toward a dry creek up which rattlesnakes persisted in wandering. I have no earthly use for a rattler, never have had since one coiled on my hatchet in the desert and I had to chase him off every time I threw it at him by pitching dust in his eyes. Anyhow, to keep out the rattlers at night I banked the tent all around and, lowering the guy-ropes slightly, placed rocks on the sides of the tent to hold it down firmly.

I was in a deep dream of peace one night when my wife detected an animal trying to scratch its way into the tent. She could see it indistinctly bumping against the wall of the tent, and with more bravery than discretion gave it a hard smack. The animal went away and she thought the incident was closed, but back it came. Then she awakened me.

"Listen!" she whispered. "Something's trying to get in the tent!" Again the animal bumped against the tent, and a second time my doughty wife gave it a large, healthy smack through the canvas.

ABOUT that time I decided I had better investigate. I poked my head out the flap of the tent, and there I looked directly into the eyes of the largest skunk I had ever seen not four feet away. He was standing in the bright moonlight directly in front of the tent, legs planted stiffly, his plume tail waving in anger, a beautiful picture for a nature student but a sight of horror to my astonished eyes.

I dropped back into the tent, and crawling softly to the back wall, I began furiously digging away the trenching.

"Here, go out the front way," said my wife.

"*Sss-h!*" I called, poking my nose back in the tent after I had got out. "You can go out there and slap that skunk again if you want to, but I'm leaving temporarily."

Which I did, and I'll leave it to any of you if that didn't show competence as an adventurer.—THOMAS TOPHAM.

AS TO war, I don't believe in it any more than in any other kind of idiocy. But so long as danger of war continues it is also idiocy not to be prepared for self-defense. Incidentally, it will be easier to credit sincerity to a good many of those busily working for reduction of our Army, Navy and National Guard when they get equally busy working for the reduction of the armed forces of Soviet Russia. Soviet Russia, rather than the U. S. A. and Canada in which and off which they live, is really their home and really commands their first allegiance. Pacifism, like charity, should begin at home. Applied to the "enemy" alone, it is itself merely warfare.

A letter from a Guardsman:

Albany, New York.

Just thought I would like to add a few words to those of "Meuse-Argonne" in the March 30th issue, in regard to the Army and the National Guard component in particular.

DUE to the precarious size of the regular establishment the National Guard has been advanced from position of the nation's second line of defense to the first line, and therefore its proper training is even more important than formerly. Strictly speaking the guardsmen of the country should be able to shoulder packs and muskets and march directly from the home armories to the scene of action. To do this the very best training is absolutely necessary, and even before this can be taken up, the enlisted personnel must be kept up to the maximum peace-time strength or, in plain English, the ranks must be kept filled at all times.

In case of national emergency the militia is usually filled with raw material which takes exhaustive training to whip into the efficient soldier, and because of this fact the working of the organization as a whole is hindered more than aided by its augmentation.

As Roosevelt said "untrained men are mere cannon-fodder." Furthermore loss of life through improper training is folly, as it accomplishes nothing, for neither objective can be gained or offensive operations repulsed as a result of such training.

HOWEVER the State of New York is doing its best to maintain a National Guard that will be able to accomplish positive results if ever called upon to do so. In fact, Governor Smith is taking a most active interest in the affairs of the Guard and has sent several special messages to the Legislature in the interest of the organization. He has also made numerous recommendations to Adjutant-General Berry in regard to possible improvements. When a man of Governor Smith's caliber shows such an active interest in the military affairs of his State it is positive proof that the guard is a far more valuable force than the actions of some States, such as Wisconsin, would lead one to believe.

Fortunately the agitation for the abolition of the Wisconsin National Guard was overcome, but nevertheless it shows that far reaching forces are at work in an attempt to undermine this most valuable part of the nation's military establishment as well as reducing the Regular Army to an all but non-combatant size.

I trust that some of my brothers gathered about the Camp-Fire will be moved to join their home town National Guard companies, after thinking over some of the facts in my little dissertation.—FRANK S. DOWLING, Corporal, D Co., 10th Inf. N. G., N. Y.

Speaking of Soviet Russia, in spite of years of dire prediction by its enemies it still exists. That suggests sound points in its system of effort against the oppressive oligarchy of capital. But it also seems to be getting a bit weaker here and there, even allowing for distorted reports by its foes. That suggests weak points in its system.

LIKE all extremes, it has run riot when given its head. The use of force breeds the use of force. To "throw off tyranny" it has established a tyranny of its own. With iron hand it crushes any attempted revolt against itself. With iron persistence it sweats in the effort to stir up revolt against other governments. It greets any interference with its own affairs as unjust and insolent; it devotes itself heart and soul to interference with the affairs of other nations. Its ringing outcries for right and justice are degenerating into the slogan "No one can be right but us, no matter what we do."

It is rule of the many by the few.

Shrewd heads lead it. Unfortunately they are ruled by opportunism, not equal justice. Their relentless logic has again and again revealed the hypocrisy and inconsistency of other nations, but unfortunately they are equally as inconsistent and hypocritical whenever they stand to gain by it. With them any end justifies any means, and what is sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander. What would happen to Americans who went to Soviet Russia and advocated any other than its present form of government, no matter how peacefully it was to be attained? Yet how righteously indignant they become over even the imprisonment of any of their many paid and official agents in America! Not that I believe in any checking of free speech (by any *citizen*) in this country short of advocating overthrow of government by force. But Soviet Russia's idea of a square deal and equal justice is as warped and rotten as that of any nation she raves against.

SHREWD heads lead it. Shrewd enough to know that logic and justice can be used as catch-words while the masses are swayed by illogical arguments and cozened through or into injustice and worse tyranny than they knew before. But not shrewd enough to know that a house built by such methods is built on sand.—A. S. H.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey and Asia Minor
27—29. Balkans. In Three Parts
30. Scandinavia
31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
32—34. South America. In Three Parts
35. Central America
36, 37. Mexico. In Two Parts
38—44. Canada. In Seven Parts
45. Alaska
46. Baffinland and Greenland
47—51. Western U. S. In Five Parts
52—55. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
56—61. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Standing Information
Lost Trails

Our Uncharted River

THINK of having a stream in this country as big as the Canadian River which still remains unsurveyed:

Question:—"Do you think it would be safe to go down the Mississippi River in a canoe? If so what time of the year would you advise the trip?

What is the farthest a canoe can travel up the Canadian River, which empties into the Arkansas River somewhere above Fort Smith? How far can a canoe travel up the Arkansas River and the Red River? These rivers all empty into the Mississippi River.

Do you think a couple of men could take a canoe up any of these rivers, starting from Pittsburgh or thereabouts? I am planning this trip for next Spring if possible for a vacation of four or five months; that is, stopping now and then to earn a few dollars to help out.

I am twenty-three years old and am familiar with electrical work and know a little about steam engines.

Kindly give me a list of a few things that would be needed on a trip like that and about what you think it would cost."—STEVEN BARNA, Cresson, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Zerr:—The Spring of the year is the best time, say about May, for your trip down the Ohio. This is about the time of the annual Spring freshets, when all the wickets of the various locks and dams in the Ohio are down, giving you an uninterrupted trip to Cairo. When the wickets are up, you must wait at each lock from one-half to one hour until the lockmaster locks you through; and you know the lockmasters are supreme. In the long run these tie-ups will amount to more than a day lost on the entire trip.

I would suggest a substantial canoe for such a trip as you inquire about; but why not get one of those detachable motors; it would save man-power until the time needed when you must buck the current and you could make better time. Am enclosing a list of locks on the Ohio River which will benefit you in your trip.

You can start from either Pittsburgh or Cincinnati; but, leaving the latter place, you cut off a big stretch of the river. The distance from Pittsburgh to Cairo is 968.5 miles, from Cairo to the mouth of the Missouri is 200 miles, thence to Fort Smith on the border of Arkansas 367.7 miles, to the mouth of the Canadian 55 miles. All good water for a canoe, but leaving Cairo it means paddling up-stream.

As to the Canadian River, little is known officially, as it is not known ever to have been surveyed; at least there are no records. From what I can gather, it rises near Springer, New Mexico, flows through the Texas Panhandle and through the center of Oklahoma and is about 650 miles long. It is assumed that it is navigable for the greatest distance.

You have a total of about 2,200 miles, a long trip.

The cost of such a trip depends entirely on yourself—meals, gas, etc. Naturally, I would not load down with unnecessary trifles, as for the greatest part on the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri Rivers you'll find towns where you can load up.

After leaving Fort Smith you would naturally have to feel your way. But if the trip is made I would greatly appreciate some word from you, especially as to conditions on the Canadian River, as I would like to put it over the Government engineers. However, they are not to blame because that river is not surveyed. It is up to the congressmen from that district, who apparently did not know, or possibly forgot, there was such a big river running through their State.

I would judge that this trip would take you at least three months' going.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Note from an "A. A." Man

A PERTINENT remark:

Laramie, Wyo.

I wish there were some way of impressing upon the minds of those who use the "A.A." service that it is necessary to send *fair-sized* envelops with stamps *not attached* for reply. These miserable tiny envelops so many enclose are certainly a nuisance; and those who send them almost invariably attach postage, so I've got to use them whether I want to or not.—FRANK MIDDLETON.

Henequen-Growing

THE plant that made Yucatan famous:

Question:—"Would you kindly give me all the information you can on Mexican lariats, maguey, ixtli and moluca, how they grow and the strongest and best to get, and where one could buy one or send for one? I am a fancy roper myself, and the ordinary maguey you buy in Pueblo and different U. S. cities is not what I want. Any information on above would be greatly appreciated."—GEORGE WELSH, Onaway, Alta., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—There is quite a variety of ropes made in Mexico from the different grasses grown down there. Most of these lariats are home made by the natives out in the rural districts. The prices of these are more than they are worth, as Americans are usually charged two or three times more than natives.

There are many stores in Mexico that handle all kinds of cordage goods, etc., so you may find what you want by writing to them. One of the best would be the Sonora News Co., Calle de Gante No. 4, City of Mexico; branch stores at Nogales, Arizona; Laredo, Texas; Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; Monterey, Mexico.

In the State of Yucatan, Mexico, are found many of the grass plants that are used for the making of ropes, cordage, baskets, hammocks, etc., although many of these same plants are grown in other sections as well. The henequen or as some call it the sisal grass, sisal hemp and sisal, comes from the *Agave Sisalense*. Ixtli is another fibrous plant which is kin to the maguey.

There are several varieties of this kind of plants. The henequen is the best. This is planted from the seed, cutting or sprouts. A field is cut, the surface is burned, and three months or so before the rainy season starts the sprouts are pulled up and thrown in a heap on the cleared land, where they are allowed to take the sun for about two months. When they have a dried and decayed appearance they are gathered up and planted in rows about four yards apart, each plant about seven feet from its brother.

About one thousand plants are planted to an acre The spaces between the rows and the plants facilitate the gathering of the crop. Otherwise the sharp thorns of one would tear the fiber leaves of its neighbor.

It takes six years for the plant to mature to bear fiber leaves. A mature plant will bear from eight to ten rings with from ten to fifteen radiating leaves. The older the leaves the stronger the fiber.

The two lower rings are cut out each year. The average productive life of the plant is ten years. The leaves are cut out with a *corba*, a machete-like instrument weighing about a pound and a half with a hooked end. Cutting is done by contract; whole Indian families from the children up are employed.

You may find out about the local prices on rope goods by writing to the consuls of the different cities—City of Mexico, Chihuahua City, Monterey, Torreon, Ciudad Victoria, all of Mexico.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Canoeing Southeastern Ontario

SEVERAL good vacation trips you might consider:

Question:—"Please let me have any information that you have in regard to an interesting ten to fifteen day canoe-trip in Ottawa Valley, southeastern Ontario. I would prefer a trip that was interesting but did not require the services of a guide, though this is not essential. Also we would prefer a trip which would allow us the opportunity for some fishing.

Our equipment consists of a seventeen-foot Old Town canoe, and outfit.

Our trip will start in the vicinity of August first. Will the flies be troublesome about then?"—EVERETT WHEELER BARTO, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—Send twenty cents to Chief Geographer, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Ont., and ask for the Kingston and Ottawa sheets Topographical Survey Map.

There are several good places to go on a canoe-trip through this southeastern part of the province. You could come to Kingston and go up the Rideau Canal to Ottawa City; or you could come to Kingston and follow the lake shore up into the Bay of Quinte; or you could go on to Ottawa up the Rideau Canal, go up the Ottawa River to Galetta or Fitzroy Harbor and go up the Mississippi River; or you could go farther up the Ottawa to Arnprior and go up the Madawaska River. You can make your trips as long or as short as you wish. And you would not need a guide, as the map is one that is easily read and understood.

You will be in interesting country all the time, and the fishing should be very good. I won't say that the flies won't bother you any, but they will not be very bad. In any event carry some good fly oil.

"Making" a Mine

ALSO a few simple tests for gold, silver, platinum:

Question:—"I own land on the bench of the Tehachipi Mountains, west of Mohave. Have been told there are gold, silver and a showing of platinum.

I know absolutely nothing about the mining game—not enough to ask questions intelligently.

Saw your notice in *Adventure*, decided to write you for information, how to make the mine after the location is made, how to work it and how to sell it.

Will certainly appreciate everything pertaining to this mining proposition."—H. N. SWINEY, Fresno, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Shaw:—In order to "make the mine" you've got to open up the ore in shape to be mined and shipped. If you can not drill and shoot the rock yourself, hire miners who understand working rock. If your ore bodies are in a vein running up a hillside, drive a tunnel, 5 x 7 in the clear, along the course of the vein. At places where good ore shows follow the ore, by upraises, every 50 or 100 feet for the same distance up; then connect the upraises by drifts parallel to your lower tunnel along the vein. This "blocks out" your ore on four sides and puts it in shape to be sampled, mined and run to the lower level through wooden chutes and trammed to surface at the portal of your main tunnel.

Keep doing this ahead and upward every place where you have ore. Make your costs less than the smelter returns from your ore, of course. If you can not do this, you have no mine.

If you have a shaft proposition you've got the added expense of raising the ore to surface, together with pumping the mine free from water, and your ore must be correspondingly richer.

Block out all the ore you can, so that an engineer may go through the mine and sample extensively to determine the amount and average value of the ore. Open it by open cuts, trenches, etc., along the surface croppings, for the same purpose. Then hunt a buyer; estimating your selling price from the gross amount of ore in sight, plus a sum for possible and probable ore ahead, and your profit.

Or you can form a stock company, incorporate for a stated number of stock shares, keep enough for control, set aside a certain number as development stock and make a contract with a broker to sell this share allotment for the cash to develop your mine.

Gold ore must be tested by fire-assay, but if the gold can be seen you can tell it this way: It is yellow, but does not alter color when viewed at different angles; it can be flattened with a hammer, or under the point of a knife it feels soft; nitric acid has no effect, but if the yellow mineral is sulfid of copper or iron (pyrites) there will be fumes escaping.

Silver can be tested by dissolving a little in a test-tube with a few drops of nitric acid. Boil until all red fumes disappear. Let this cool and then add a little water. Filter the whole and add a few drops of muriatic acid, which will throw down a white chlorid of silver.

Dissolve this with ammonia and add nitric again. When this result is exposed to light a while it will show a violet tint if there is silver present.

Platinum is rather hard to treat. You take a mixture of nitric acid and muriatic—aqua regia—and add your powdered ore to it and boil it for about two hours. Add a small amount of alcohol and filter, after which you add ammonia chlorid. The platinum will be then thrown down as a precipitate.

I hope this may help you out; if you need more information such as I can give, don't hesitate to write.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Touring by Wagon through the South

HILL roads where the ruts are a hundred years old:

Question:—"It is my intention, with a companion, to make a transcontinental trip, expecting to start by October 1 from some point in western Maryland or Pennsylvania. We propose going by road with a light wagon and camping-outfit and help pay expenses by exercising certain sales rights we have secured and for which we are qualified. This will be possible as time is not a factor, and there will be ample opportunity to stop and rest up. The business feature will require our making what points, and as many sections, where dairying, agriculture, and stock-breeding are carried on as are practical.

Our purpose is to enjoy a prolonged, interesting and healthful trip and to recover normal state of nerves and health after years of city work and living, though there is nothing organically wrong with either of us; our ages are thirty-eight and forty-eight, respectively.

While unfixed, the Northwest is looked to as the end of the trip—Washington, Oregon or northern California—but our decision may be made for some section we visit *en route*.

Neither of us has ever undertaken such an extensive trip of such character, but both have had some experience in camping and have traveled in this and other countries.

Our outfit, including wagon and equipment, will weigh around 1,500 pounds.

Would it be better to have two horses weighing about 1,000 each or a good active single horse weighing around 1,300? To reiterate, the roadwork will be slow with plenty of rests.

What kind of weather would we be likely to encounter from October 1 to Spring through the States our route would take us? Would you consider so late a start practicable? What would be the probable road conditions? We want to avoid, if possible, extreme weather and would like to know which routing would be advisable—say from western Maryland or Pennsylvania into West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, etc., or taking a more southerly route.

What weight underclothing, clothing and top clothing should be taken? At what time would we be likely to strike much wet or rainy weather?

While we have about decided to outfit a wagon for the trip, we would rather find if possible a reasonably priced wagon especially suited for such a trip, either new or in good condition second hand, and would appreciate any suggestion you might be able to make.

Any information you can give, and any suggestions, will be greatly appreciated, and I wish to take this opportunity of thanking both yourself and *Adventure* in anticipation for both the courtesy and service.

Should this inquiry be printed, I would request that you please not use name or address."

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—I would work toward the Southwest through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, through north Georgia and Alabama, then into Arkansas north to the Ozarks of Missouri. By that time if worked slowly it would be near Spring and you could choose what route you wished.

As for rainy seasons in these localities the worst are in Spring. The Winters are usually open and mild, but sometimes if it is a warm Winter there is considerable rainfall. You can never tell in advance.

By all means get a team, even if they are only 800 pounds apiece. A single big horse is not worth his feed in the hills. Except for the auto highways, in the hills for a century the roads have been rutted to two horses, and a single horse would have half the time to walk on a ridge between and have to pull a badly handicapped vehicle. Above all don't forget to get a wide-track vehicle. You will have lots of straddling to do, and the roads are practically adapted to such wagons. Any other kind will be a bother and hard to achieve the hills with. You can never tell a thing ahead about the roads unless you follow entirely the auto highways, and they might not bring you to the selling-localities you want. But it will be better than the northern route, especially as you will have no gumbo to contend with, though the hills will be in abundance.

As for a wagon, you ought be able to tell about one in the market nearer to you than I, especially a second-hand one. Get if possible what is known as a park wagon, strong, with heavy elliptic or Concord springs. You should select one with a top. This wagon should suit, unless you had rather travel in a light farm wagon with oxbow cover. I would have both medium and heavy clothing, because there are sudden changes of temperature in the South. While not lasting long, you will feel them for a day as severely as a blizzard in the North.

Before closing will give you the best piece of advice I can: Don't spare axle-grease, and feed your team well.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Nigeria

WHAT the adventurer may expect to find there:

Question:—"I am interested in Nigeria and would like to have the following information:

I was born in Boston and lived in New York, but I have never been out of this latitude. Do you think I could succeed in living in Nigeria either by myself or with one companion?

Is it possible to live off of the land in southern Nigeria by hunting and fishing?

What is the main trade of the country?

Could one or two persons get along without guides?

What would be the approximate expenses, if any, of living in this country?

How would a person get from the United States to Nigeria, and what would be the approximate expense?

Are there many insect pests?

What game animals are to be found there, and is a license required?

What kinds of guns would you advise? Approximate cost?

Any other useful information you can give me would be greatly appreciated.

Please use only my initials if this should be published."—R. P., Logansport, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Simpson:—I am glad to note from your letter that you are interested in Nigeria, but I am afraid I must be discouraging at the very outset, because, unless you could secure a position with one of the trading-companies there, it would be well-nigh impossible for you to make the country's acquaintance. It is not customary for white people to go to Nigeria other than in the service of a trading-company or the Government.

I would not say that it was impossible to live off the land by hunting and fishing, but white men do not do it largely because it is neither proper nor at all healthful. Well and expensively organized hunting-parties are a possibility and fairly frequent; but they are undoubtedly expensive, and they don't stay there very long—less than a year for the most part.

The main trade of the country is palm-oil, palm-nut kernels, rubber, a little cotton, some ivory; and in Bauchi, Northern Nigeria, there are tin-mines that make quite a respectable showing.

It would be impossible to get along without guides or carriers—which more or less mean the same thing.

There is a line of steamers out of New York—the Bull Line—which carries passengers direct to West Africa. Or you could go to Liverpool, England, and take the Elder-Dempster Line from there. Offhand I don't know which is cheaper; but I do know the trip, any way you take it, is an expensive one. The cost of a one-way first-class passage from New York to Lagos or Forcados is $305. There is no second-class. The service is one boat per month.

The names of the insect pests in Nigeria are legion, but the mosquito, sand-fly and mango-fly is enumeration enough for most folks!

In answer to your query on game animals, etc., I'll quote Captain A. J. N. Tremearne on the subject:

> "Northern Nigeria is perhaps the best shooting-country in West Africa. The 'beef' (wild animals) includes lions, rhinoceri, giraffes, with some species of antelope; and leopards are almost everywhere. Wart-hog are found in many provinces. Of the birds, partridges, snipe, guinea fowl and pigeons exist in most parts. Egrets and marabous have valuable feathers, but the marabous are now protected and the egrets partially so."

That, I think, is enough to be going on with. The cost of licenses ranges from ten pounds (approximately $45) to five shillings (about $1) according to what you want to shoot. "A collector's license—ten pounds—gives one the right to shoot practically an unlimited number of animals and birds."

Licenses are good for one year only, but may be renewed month by month thereafter. No licenses are issued until arms have been registered.

Guns are out of my province, but Captain Tremearne's selection may help some:

> 1 12-bore C. F. breech-loader, hammerless, Anson Deeley action, full choke, finely bored, automatic safety bolt . . . . . about £7:15/-
> 1 single-barrel .303 sporting-rifle with magazine . . . . about £7-
> Sporting pattern Martini-Metford rifle .303 (price apparently unknown).

This selection, as well as the prices, is English, and I can't advise you at all in American equivalents as I do not pretend to know anything about the respective merits of guns of any kind.

I might add in conclusion that the only American trading-company in Nigeria is established in Lagos. There is none in the interior; all of the others being English or Scotch.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Telegraph Creek

LOTS of solitude and wilderness hard by:

"*Question:*—"I am planning to start for N. W. Canada next Summer and would like to get settled down in the woods where I am to spend the Winter before the real Winter starts.

I am to stop at the foothills of the Rockies in northern B. C. or southern Yukon.

I wish information as to the following:

Where is the wildest place to be found within four or five days' travel from a trading-post where one can obtain rations?

Can one find a good place where there is good game and fur-bearing animals on or near the Laird River?

How far are the trading-posts or settlements apart in N. B. C. and S. Yukon?

Can a party of two navigate with a small boat the Athabaska River from Athabaska Landing to the Athabaska Lake, then the Slave to the Great Slave Lake, then over the Mackenzie to the Laird River?

Is there some other place in this region that is better than the one mentioned above that you would recommend?

Can you give a comparison of prices of food in this district to those in the States?

What laws and regulations could one expect to be enforced in regard to hunting and trapping?

Where is the fir most dense?

Where is the most remote region?

Where is the thinnest settled region?

There are a couple of us doughboys to make this trip; there will be about $2,000 between us. Do you think that sufficient funds to spend a couple of years in the woods? I had rather have only my initials published."—C. R. G.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The trip you have mapped out means a heap of unnecessary hardship with no recompense. Would advise you to abandon this idea and investigate the conditions on the upper Stikine River.

You can go in from Fort Wrangel to Telegraph Creek by launch, which brings you into one of the best game and fur countries I know of. You will have no cause to complain of overcrowding on the part of your neighbors since white faces in that section are almighty scarce.

Everything you require in the line of outfit may be obtained at Telegraph Creek; but as for prices—excuse me. We do not even know the prices of average commodities here in civilization for a longer period than a day at a time. If you will write the Hylan Estate, Telegraph Creek, Glenora, B. C., you will be able to get a sort of general idea of how things run; but with the amount of time to intervene between now and next Summer this would only be a waste of time. Suffice to say that I think your capital is ample for your needs.

Write to Deputy Minister of Lands, Victoria, B. C., asking for a map and other data relative to the Cassiar district and also for a copy of Provincial Bulletin No. 23. This will give you a heap of information along general lines, and I am sure you will get all the solitude and wilderness experience you are looking for within a few days' hike from the creek.

A letter to the Government Agent, Glenora, B. C., would bring you a very reliable statement of present conditions in that country which might be of assistance to you.

Maori Literature

A RACE of splendid aborigines saved from oblivion by means of the printed word through the forehandedness of our New Zealand brethren:

Question:—"Could you as a great favor inform me as to the best place to procure Maori literature, relative to ancient customs, warfare, religion and more especially old Maori legends? If you can do this you will greatly oblige."—Leslie E. Gaskin, Martinborough, Wairarapa, N. Z.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—Write to Whitcombe & Tombs, publishers, Lambton Quay, Wellington, N. Z., for their catalog of books on New Zealand and the Maori. Already this firm has published quite a Maoriological library of books.

Don't miss Dr. Newman's "Who Are the Maoris?" And if you also write to the Government Printer, Wellington, and ask him for a list of books and pamphlets on Maori subjects you will be surprized at the length and the cheapness thereof. Sir George Grey's books on the Maori are classics. Then there are Judge Manning's "The Pakeha-Maoris" and White's "Maori Legends"—but they are difficult to get, and dear. *Kia Ora!*

Hiking the Maine Forests

WHAT to put in the forty-pound pack:

Question:—"Would like to know if you would tell me what equipment is necessary for one man to take on a long jaunt through the forests.

I also would like to know if it would be possible for me to settle down there for a few years in the woods and what part is the most favorable. I want a good wild lonesome part."—Daniel A. Gleeson, Albany, N. Y.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—Pardon the delay in answering your letter as a serious illness has prevented my attending to it before this.

Now if you could give me a little more definite information about yourself I think I could advise you much better. You say you want a "wild, lonesome part." There is a whole lot of that sort of country in the northern Maine wilderness, and a man must be a rugged cuss to pack his supplies, bedding, etc., through this country and not weaken. No doubt you might be able to find a camp in some spot not too far from a supply base, where you could be as lonesome as you pleased, but are you able physically to stand a Winter in the Maine woods alone?

A man might enjoy a hike of a few weeks with a small pack of say thirty or forty pounds which would grow lighter all the time—Compac tent, blanket, extra woolen hose, mess-kit, dehydrated fruit and vegetables, egg and milk powder, tea or coffee, bacon, meal, prepared flour, sweet chocolate if you like it, pea-meal, sausage, matches in water-proof container, fishing-tackle, fly dope in season, first-aid kit, etc. By the time you get it all together you will find you have about all you can pack on your back all day. The right sort of footwear is one of the most essential things on a hike, for if your feet get sore you are sure out of luck.

If I have not hit you on the information you are looking for try me again.

Some Shot!

WHAT the 180-grain, .30-caliber bullet can do:

Question:—"What I desire to know is whether, in your opinion, the cal. .30 Govt. '06 cartridge with new-style 180-grain pointed expanding (soft-point) bullet is as good for big game as the 220-grain bullet, soft point. Personally it does not seem to me it would be, but have no way of telling yet, not having tried the new bullet."—Frank H. Hanson, Mauston, Wisc.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I consider a 180-grain bullet in the .30 caliber as good as if not a better killer than the 220-grain. A friend shot a buck last Fall with the 180-grain from his .30-'06 Newton. The bullet entered the right side, smashed two ribs to powder, shattered the spine, cutting off three ribs, circled the body, shattering three more ribs, cut off the spine and emerged within three inches of the point of entrance and was lost in the fern. Some shot, eh?

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Minerals of South Africa

JUST now that part of the world is a good place to stay away from unless you have capital:

Question:—"Please answer the following questions on your section of Africa:

What minerals are there?

Do you think there are any opportunities for a prospector and hunter there?

What kind of game is there?

Are the game laws very strict?

What kind of climate? Is it healthy?

Name the different kinds of employment that are to be got there. Is there lots of it, and what is the average wages they pay there, especially in the mines?

What is the chief language?"—L. H. Ruschill, Chichagoff, Alaska.

Answer, by Capt. Franklin:—The chief minerals in Africa are gold, diamonds, coal, copper, iron, tin, lead, graphite, mica, asbestos, manganese, silver and zinc. There are still opportunities for a prospector.

There are all kinds of game, both big game and smaller animals—lions, elephants, eland, buffalo, haarte beeste, wilde beeste, all kinds of antelope, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, etc. The game-laws are very strict indeed, and must be carefully followed.

The climate is splendid throughout. It is out of the question to obtain employment at the present time in South Africa. The chief languages are the Dutch, English and Zulu languages. If you have a capital of $5,000 it is a good country to go to, otherwise not.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

ONE of the most interesting of American songs, or "song-ballets" as they are sometimes called, is "Frankie and Johnnie." No one knows who wrote it, and no two versions are the same.

It should, of course, be sung in order to be really effective. Any one who has heard Carl Sandberg croon it to the accompaniment of his guitar will never forget the dramatic effect of the story or the haunting melody of the refrain.

The version printed here is similar to that sung by Carl Sandberg. It was sent to me last November by a student in a New York college.

Frankie and Johnnie

Frankie and Johnnie were lovers—
Oh, Lordy! How they could love!
Swore to be true to each other,
Just as true as the stars above.
He was her man,
But he done her wrong.

Johnnie went down to the corner
To get him a cool glass of beer.
Frankie went down in an hour or so
And said, "Has Johnnie been here?
He was my man,
But he done me wrong."

The bartender said to Frankie,
"I ain't goin' to tell you no lie:
Johnnie was here just an hour ago
With a woman called Nellie Bly.
He was your man,
But he done you wrong."

Frankie went back to the corner,
This time it wasn't for fun,
Sewed in her yellow kimona
Was a blue-barreled forty-four gun
To shoot her man
Who done her wrong.

Johnnie ran down the back staircase,
Shoutin,' "Honey, for God's sake don't shoot!"
But Frankie cut loose with her forty-four gun
And the gun went root-a-toot-toot.
She shot her man
Who done her wrong.

"Turn me over gently,
Turn me over slow,
Turn me over on my right side
So the bullet won't hurt me so.
I was your man,
But I done you wrong."

"Bring out your rubber-tired hearses,
Bring out your rubber-tired hacks:
Take poor Johnnie to the graveyard
And never bring him back.
He was my man,
But he done me wrong."

The sheriff took poor Frankie
Just at the break of day,
Locked her up in a dungeon
And took the keys away.
She shot her man
Who done her wrong.

Frankie said to the jury,
"What'll the verdict be?"
Jury said to Frankie:
"Why it's murder in the first degree.
You shot your man,
Though he done you wrong."

Frankie said to the warden,
"What are they goin' to do?"
The warden said to Frankie:
"It's the electric chair for you.
You shot your man
Who done you wrong."

They put poor Frankie in the 'lectric chair,
And turned the current on:
Ten thousand volts shot through her frame
And to hell they both have gone—
She and her man
Who done her wrong.

Who can give further information about the above song? How old is it? Is it based on a real happening? Where is it sung? What part had the negro in its composition? What other versions are there? It's information of this sort coming from you men about the camp-fire that will make it possible some day for us to have a real collection of the songs of the American people. What any one of us knows about these songs amounts to very little, but what all of us put together know amounts to a great deal. Chip in your bit; it will help.

A COMRADE in West Virginia is anxious to get a complete version of a railway song about a wreck on a Southern road. All that he can remember is:

> Old 97 pulled in to Monroe
> Twenty minutes behind her time.
> They gave him his orders, saying,
> "Stephen, you're 'way behind."

That sounds like a verse from one of those songs from which "Casey Jones" was made. The best known version of this song was published in *Adventure*, May 10, 1923. Before this version was made there were various songs and scattered verses dealing with "Charlie Snyder," "Hobo John," "Jay Gould's Daughter," etc. These were especially popular with the negroes, and furnished a good deal of the material from which "Casey" was made. Two of them went as follows:

Charlie Snyder was a good engineer.
Told his fireman never to fear;
All he wanted was the water and the coal;
Put your head out the window, watch the drivers roll,
    Watch the drivers roll,
    Watch the drivers roll;
Put your head out the window, watch the drivers roll.

Jay Gould's daughter said before she died
"There's one more road I'd like to ride."
"Tell me, daughter, what might that be?"
"It's in Southern California on the Santa Fe.
    On the Santa Fe,
    On the Santa Fe;
It's in Southern California on the Santa Fe."

If you're enough interested to send in all the material you can, we'll make up a "Casey Jones" issue, and it will be one of the best issues we've ever had. How about it?

CAN any one help "Big Jim" Harriman of Los Angeles, who wants to find the rest of a cowboy poem that begins:

> When your head an' heart are weary,
> An' you beller long an' loud;
> An' you feel a fittin' subjec'
> To be measured for a shroud;
> Set an' figger up your blessin's
> 'Stid o' allers findin' fault,
> An' a-lookin' as dejected
> As a sick cow lickin' salt.

ANOTHER reader in St. Louis would like a complete version of a song that his mother used to sing to him when he was a boy. All that he can remember is:

> Away in the West where the buffalo roam,
> Where the deer and the antelope play,
> Where never is heard a discouraging word
> And the skies are not cloudy all day.

REQUESTS from other readers have been received for the following songs or poems: "I Want to Go Home" (a trench song)—"Kate and the Tanner"—"Kelly, the Pirate"—"The Banks of Newfoundland"—"Walking into Jerusalem Just Like John"—"John L. Sullivan and Queen Mary," or "John L. Sullivan's Trip Round the World"—"Denver Dick"—"The Hobo's Will"—"The Liverpool Lassies"—"John Paul Jones"—"Captain Cottington"—"To the Spanish Main"—"Rattlin', Battlin', Colt or Gatlin', Regular Army Man"—"We'll Chase the Buffalo"—"The Huckleberry Huntin' "—"Subig"—"Damn, Damn, Damn the Insurrectos"—"Under De Soto's Cross"—"Harry Dunn" — "John Cherokee"—"The California Brothers"—"Whip Jamboree."

SEND all material and all questions direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley, Calif. Do not send questions to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

AUGUST 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

REPUTATION — ***W. C. Tuttle***
A bandit rides out of the storm.

THE TIGER KID — ***Frederick Moore***
Capt. Coddle's cabin-boy is skilled at legerdemain.

HIDDEN GUNS — ***Henry W. Patterson***
Safety first in a snow-bound cabin.

FOMBOMBO A Four-Part Story Part II — ***T. S. Stribling***
The dictator attacks San Geronimo.

BROADCAST — ***Will H. Grattan***
The prospector entertains a visitor with his radio.

The Little Yellow Envelope That Keeps "Big" Men Small

Homer E. Minor
of Texas

"Six months after starting work I cleared $1000. My next ambition was realized a year ago last October when I moved into a home of my own. Cost $7000—built especially for my work.

"Now guess what I'm planning? Well, I leave in ten days for New York City. Just bought a new car which is being equipped for the trip overland."

Mr. Minor is only one of hundreds who have solved the extra-money problem with our easy money-making plan.

HOW many "big" men have been robbed of the good things in life by the tyranny of "the little yellow envelope" slipped through the cashier's window each week? The number is legion—men who have found a drugging "safety" in meager salaries, but *lost* their real opportunity to make good.

To-day an unknown mechanic asks his friends to back him *with their money* in manufacturing a new invention. They demur—all but one or two. The invention becomes the greatest in automobile history—the inventor one of the world's richest men—the friends who saw their opportunity, millionaires in their own right. But the friends who "stayed out"—are unknown.

For many years we have asked men to invest, *not* money, but only a few minutes of their time to learn the truth about our money-making plan. Thousands have responded. To many hundreds we have given the key to $5, $10, $15 *extra* each week—earned in their spare time. Scores of others, on full time, have built up permanent incomes ranging from $40 a week to $10,000 a year. Why not join these men?

All we ask is the chance to show you how others have made good—with only a few hours work each week—as special representatives of ADVENTURE and our three other leading publications, THE DELINEATOR, THE DESIGNER and EVERYBODY'S. You don't need experience—we *give* you that, and all supplies and particulars absolutely free. There is no obligation of any kind. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by returning the coupon below. Clip it out and mail now!

Very often whole lives are changed by trivial things. So simple an act as clipping a coupon has frequently multiplied incomes 2 and 3 times. The coupon on the right gives you just such an opportunity. Mail it to-day.

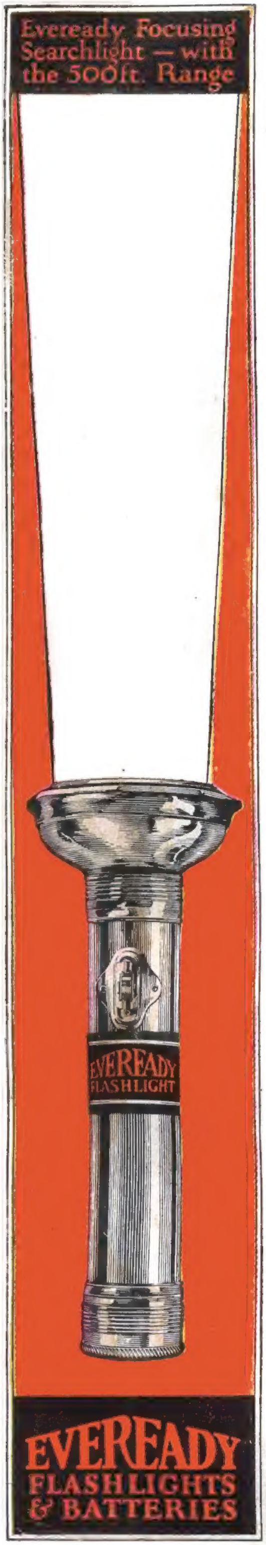
Manager, Staff Agencies Division
Box 971, Butterick Bldg., New York City

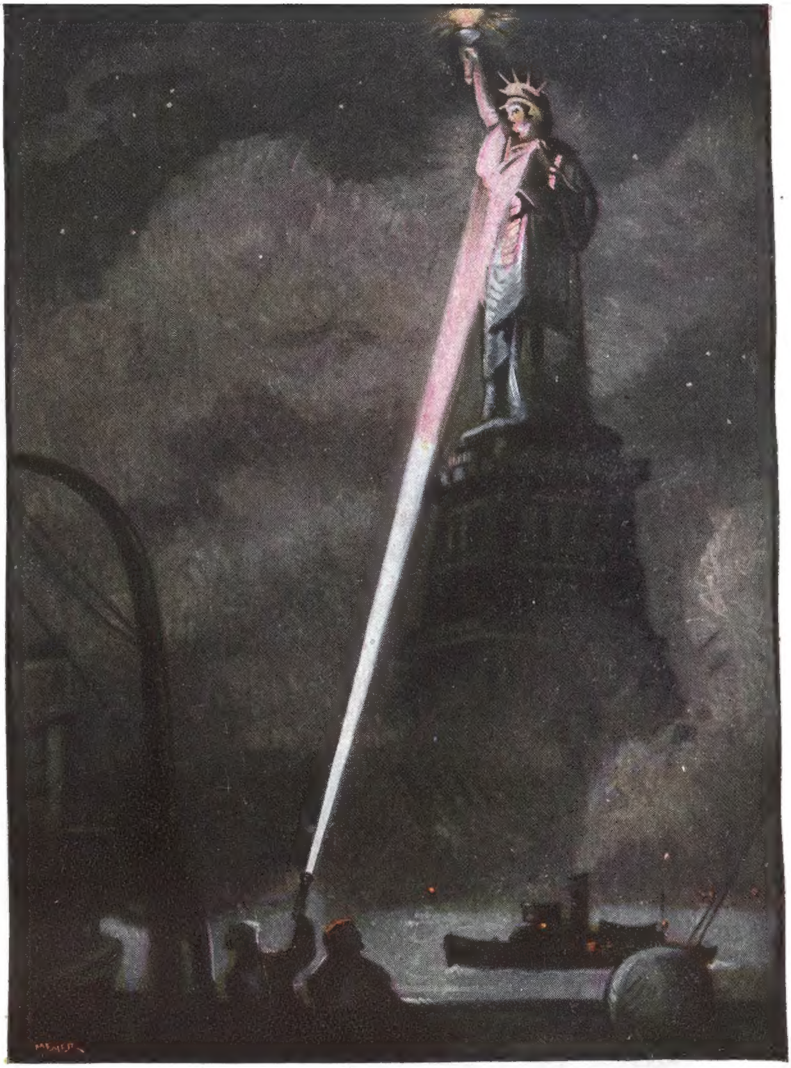
Please send me, without obligation, full particulars of your money-making plan.

Name..

Street..

City.............................. *State*....................


Eveready Focusing Searchlight — with the 500ft. Range
EVEREADY FLASHLIGHT
EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS & BATTERIES



" . . . A 500-foot bee-line of light. An Eveready Focusing Searchlight is an outdoor necessity."

Another Eveready triumph—the new Eveready Focusing Searchlight with the *500-foot range*—a real *hand searchlight*—tears a hole in fog, smoke, or blackest night!

A more powerful longer range development of the noted Eveready Spotlight. The most intense light concentrated in a Flashlight for popular use—3,000 candle power at the focal point in a broad beam of piercing light. Automobilists, campers, vacationists, firemen, policemen, watchmen, seamen, sportsmen on land and water, let your experience with the Spotlight tell you what this Searchlight can do for you. Try it. We've priced it low—$4.50 complete with batteries, and extra Eveready concentrated filament Mazda lamp in end cap—in either corrugated fibre or nickel-plated case.